

Interview with John E. Graves

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JOHN E. GRAVES

Interviewed by: Richard Jackson

Initial interview date: January 12, 1999

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Q: This is an oral history interview with John Graves conducted in Paris on January 12, 1999 by Richard Jackson. John, I see that you were born in Michigan. Do you want to say a little bit about where you came from and how you got interested in foreign affairs, your education, and the start of your lifelong involvement with the French language.

GRAVES: I was born a few yards from the Canadian border in a region where the old folks still spoke French, which doesn't have much to do with the reason I eventually got interested in foreign affairs and the Foreign Service. But it does explain why I spent most of my career in French-speaking countries. I went to school on the American side, but spent summers in our house on the Canadian side. After the University of Michigan, my father wanted me to do a stint at Universit# Laval in Quebec.

Q: *So, you came out of your education bilingual in English anFrench and then taught for a time at the school and university level.*

GRAVES: My first experience overseas, other than with the Navy at the very end of World War II, came as the result of a Smith-Mundt Grant which took me to Morocco to teach at the university in Rabat. From there, I was seconded for a summer to Besan#on, a university in France. I returned to the U.S. with a new-found interest in foreign affairs.

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What with six children it also occurred to me that I would probably make a better living in the Foreign Service than as a teacher and writer.

Q: We will be talking about Morocco later on. How was it in those early years? You were there three years after independence and seemed to have been there at the time that Mohammed V died and Hassan became king. How was that process as an observer?

GRAVES: We were worried because many people who had lived in Morocco for a long time, who had been born and raised there, mostly French, were much concerned that the whole country would come unstuck. Hassan didn't dare go on the radio, for example, speaking Arabic. His colloquial Arabic wasn't adequate to the occasion. His education was in French and he may even have had a French wife, who had somehow to disappear. In any case, it seems he was married to a Moroccan within hours after his father's totally unexpected death and he eventually learned to speak excellent Arabic.

Q: *This was Hassan II?*

GRAVES: Yes. But I should qualify what I just said. It was commonly believed at the time that he was married very quickly to a Moroccan. Nonetheless, people were concerned that there would be disorder and riots. The left was strong. Remember Ben Barka who was condemned in absentia and eventually killed in Paris.

Q: *What was the reaction that you remember among your students at the university to the death of Mohammed V?*

GRAVES: Almost none. The students themselves didn't seem to be much concerned, which surprised me. They were not, however, a representative group. Many were Jewish Moroccans, as the university had not yet managed to figure out how to attract Muslims. There were a great many French students. I had a few Muslim students, one of whom I have maintained contact with all these years, but he was of Algerian extraction. At this point, I was a professor rather than an experienced Foreign Service officer who knew

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how to ask leading questions. Thus my knowledge of what was going on in Morocco was limited to what I happened to hear.

Q: So, the university was really a legacy of the French period and not the mass production institution of today with thousands and thousands of students?

GRAVES: Right. The traditional university was in Fez, while the university in Rabat was a French creation.

Q: Being there in those years, how did the country then seem to you? Did you anticipate that it would follow more or less the course that it has since?

GRAVES: After a few months, it seemed to calm down. I had the impression that Morocco was probably going to become fairly stable, but stay very French. As long as Hassan II remains on the throne, I think it will remain very French as compared to the rest of the Arab world.

Q: *The French were out of Morocco officially with some bitterness.*

GRAVES: Meknes and all of that, yes. There were uprisings and some deaths. Quite a number of French left during the time that we were there in the late 1950s-early 1960s. But I had the impression that the French were still pretty well running everything. There were a great many businesses, for example, in French hands, not to mention all the French in the government. The whole system was French. This has changed very gradually. The last time we were in Morocco, we noticed that French influence was reduced. But even now, educated Moroccans often talk to each other in French, which is always startling to people coming from the outside. They use their version of Arabic in family, but it's not the language they communicate in for most business purposes.

Q: What did people think of you in 1959 as an American there shortly after Moroccan independence? There must have been some curiosity on their part.

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GRAVES: A little bit. I think they were very favorable to Americans and hoped to play America off against France. There were three or four fairly big American military bases, one near Rabat. Americans certainly weren't ill-viewed. I was comfortable, as were our children who went to French school. Educated Moroccans heard my Canadian accent and knew that I wasn't French.

Q: Did you have any interaction with the embassy at that time? Did that have any role in steering you towards a government career?

GRAVES: Very little. There was some contact with the cultural affairs officer, but apart from that, almost none. I didn't understand embassies and wasn't much interested. I didn't know why certain Americans in the embassy invited me and my family. I later found out that our hosts were mostly CIA trying to keep tabs on the university. I was naive and innocent.

Q: So, you completed your service there. Then you went ahead and into the government, into USIA. You must have gone back to Washington for some training and then were first posted as cultural affairs officer in Leopoldville arriving there in 1962.

GRAVES: Leopoldville was the beginning of my Foreign Service education. I remember the first startling experience: I was assistant cultural affairs officer and suddenly had to cope with a project which I wasn't supposed to know about. The U.S. was recruiting Angolan students to be sent to the United States for education. The students who came to see me had escaped to the Belgian Congo, which was in the throes of becoming independent and chaotic, what with Dag Hammarskjöld and Patrice Lumumba being killed. The first UN peace-keeping operation. We were in the middle of the first big post-independence disorder in Africa with the UN playing a very large role. To get back to my experience, because the Angolan students came to me and seemed perfectly legitimate, I sent a clear-channel telegram to Washington. It was about these students, their needs and their travel arrangements. I was severely chastised because this was a highly classified

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operation. So that was my first experience with the left hand not knowing what the right hand was doing. I had simply done what a cultural affairs officer is supposed to do and suddenly I was in trouble because I didn't know it was a classified CIA project.

Q: The whole world of cultural affairs officer in that kind of turbulent time in the Congo (later Zaire) must have made it perplexing to figure out what your role was and what you could do. It was certainly a different culture than you had experienced in Morocco.

It was very different. But the main thing I was learning about was the American Foreign Service and all of the other American entities that operate overseas. I had two other experiences that were rather revealing. One had to do with a newspaper which I was at great pains to cultivate and to place information in. I discovered belatedly that it was owned and operated by the CIA. The other thing was that at the university there were American students. I naively thought they were just students who were interested in African affairs and were on campus because it was a big university. However, when I had dealings with them, I found they were not much like typical American students. I eventually learned that the CIA planted Americans in foreign universities and subsidized American student organizations' participation in international gatherings.

Maybe the left hand should be told what the right hand is doing. The principle that we're all very familiar with, the need to know, needs to be reconsidered. Much later, when I was a senior officer and privy to a great deal of information which I could not share with my staff, I saw confusion and frustration sap the morale of good officers. I came out of university with the impression that our government was straightforward, honest, and doing the right thing and had to learn from experiences that our government is complicated, has many facets in conflict with each other, and that little is really what it seems.

One more example. When President Kennedy died, I remember being shocked and annoyed with foreigners, especially the French, who were cynical about it, and who, like most Latinos, whether they be in Latin America, Spain, France, Italy, or Portugal, see

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everything in terms of political plots. I argued, "No, no, even our graffiti isn't political. It's scatological or sexual, not political. Our assassinations are almost always due to a single individual, oftentimes demented, just simply running amuck. We're not like Latin countries, where everything is political." Over the years, looking back at the Kennedy assassination and all the unlikely wrinkles, I just don't know. I would certainly not be willing to say as I did in 1963 in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) to my contacts: "No, no, I'm absolutely sure the Kennedy assassination was strictly a matter of a single individual."

Q: 1962 was pretty early in our country's experience of Africa. There was a lot of misplaced optimism about democratizing and making Africa over. As cultural affairs officer, what did that really mean in Leopoldville? Were you bringing American culture and musical groups? What tools did you have?

GRAVES: I think we were well supported in the sense that we certainly had means. The most important were the lectures and the visiting professors at the university and all sorts of other visitors, including Assistant Secretary of State Williams, American astronauts, and Buckminster Fuller. I remember these people especially because I was their escort-interpreter. That was where I got my start being the principal interpreter, in French at least, for American astronauts. One of the astronauts, Conrad, liked to tell funny stories. Many funny stories are not translatable. There is a cultural input that makes it almost impossible. So, at one point, rather than try to translate, I said in French to my Belgian, French, and Congolese audience of several hundred people, "Mr. Conrad has just told a funny joke, so please laugh." Of course, Conrad didn't understand what I said. Everybody thought my ploy was hilarious and they applauded and laughed. After that, Conrad always wanted me as his interpreter.

Q: *In promoting U.S. presence, was there a friction with the Belgians, the French, or others there?*

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GRAVES: I didn't find there was much friction. We got on well with the Belgians, even the Flemish. We didn't have any complaints about the Belgians. But we did have very serious problems. Our consulate in Stanleyville was taken over and our people were held hostage. I remember much later the nonsense in the American media, when I got to Iran and was taken hostage, about how this was the first time that American diplomats had been taken hostage, which was utter nonsense, another example of the media not knowing what they're talking about. There were several other examples. In Stanleyville, I was personally involved. By that time, I had been transferred to the eastern Congo to Bukavu to work with consular officer Bill Schaufele.

Q: That was a transfer in 1964.

GRAVES: Right.

Q: Before we get to Bukavu and that experience, you mentioned Shaba I, the first UN operation in the Congo, unraveling. It was a period of great turmoil. Was that the period of Mac Godley in the embassy?

GRAVES: Mac Godley was the ambassador at the end. Before that, it was Edmund Gullion.

Q: What sort of tone did they set and how were those embassies to work with?

GRAVES: Gullion had personal access to the White House and President Kennedy, which reminds me of an amusing incident. An American sailor had killed another American sailor aboard an American ship at Matadi, which is 100 kilometers from the sea. Therefore there was a problem of jurisdiction. I went with Ambassador Gullion to discuss the murder with President Kasavubu. The Ambassador used me as interpreter when he thought a discussion might be a bit sticky and he might not catch some nuance. The murder occurred clearly in the Congo and therefore it was Congolese jurisdiction. When the President finally understood that the American sailor only killed another American, he said, if I translate roughly, "I could care less (Je m'en fous.)." Gullion was very upset that

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this murderer was going to go scott-free. So he decided to prevail upon Washington to somehow take on jurisdiction. In the meantime he would keep the sailor in Leopoldville. For want of a better idea, he put him in an apartment with the most junior of the junior officers because junior officers in those days did all the dirty work. So Peter Leiden had to live with a murderer. I knew Peter well because I was a young officer. We were colleagues. I was lucky that I had an easier job as interpreter. By the end of the first week, Peter was feeling pretty jumpy, living with this murderer who glowered and didn't look at all as if he were friendly or safe. So, Peter finally asked, "Why don't you escape?" The sailor looked out the window. It was an apartment building overlooking the central market and there were several thousand Congolese down below. The murderer looked down and growled, "Are you crazy?"

Q: Mac Godley was sort of a different character.

GRAVES: He was less straight-laced and less concerned about such things. Besides, by that time, the sailor had been turned over to American marshals who had come out to escort him back to the United States for trial.

Q: The big events one thinks about in that period... Dag Hammarskjöld died in a plane crash.

GRAVES: By this time, most of us were less naive about Africa and less certain that we knew what was going on. I'm not willing to say that it was an accident. I just don't know. Certainly, at the time, there was much speculation as to what had really happened. The same thing with regard to Patrice Lumumba only more so. We have a better idea of what happened to Tshombe whom I knew well. I was his interpreter and traveled with him. I had the job of reporting on what was going on around Tshombe.

Q: Tshombe was by then President?

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GRAVES: At that point, he was a Governor and was very much in power in the eastern Congo.

Q: And we were backing him in the aftermath of Lumumba?

GRAVES: Right. He eventually became Prime Minister and then was shunted aside by Mobutu, whom I didn't like at all. But the CIA station chief was very friendly with Mobutu and may have been involved in the disappearance of Lumumba as well as other dodgy business with Mobutu later on. In any case, the U.S., along with France and Belgium, supported Mobutu. In my view, Colonel Mulumba would have been a much better choice. I've never been in sympathy with the American government's tendency to support despicable people. Our obsessive anti-Communism. That's probably the single most important concern I had all through my years of being a Foreign Service officer and serving the government. I always had the feeling that we were wrong when we put anti-Communism ahead of everything else. In the long-term, it didn't serve our interests.

Q: Talk a little bit about Tshombe.

GRAVES: I found him delightfully open, not at all racist. He was interested in being served by able people and therefore many of his aides weren't black. They were an eclectic lot. He himself was certainly very intelligent, quick to learn, and had a good understanding of human nature, human psychology. He was a good companion in the sense that he was fun to be with, fun to have dinner with, and was full of piercing asides. A little excursion. Tshombe was a favorite of my wife. After a long trip (I as his interpreter because he had to cope with English speakers), we got back to Bukavu and the province of the Kivu, where the governor put on a big reception for Prime Minister Tshombe. When he came into the room, he took a glass of champagne from one of the trays and presented it to Madame Graves and thanked her for lending him her husband during the long trip. So she has a very warm spot in her heart for Mo#se.

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Q: The turmoil in the Congo that you mentioned was largely in the Stanleyville area and Leopoldville was a long way away?

GRAVES: You have to keep in mind that the Congo is enormous. It also has enormous natural resources. But most Africans who lived there had no idea they were Congolese. Almost all conflict was tribal. I would add that, despite what you might read in the newspapers, anyone who really knows Africa knows that almost everything that is going on in Africa, even today, all the conflicts are essentially tribal. I used to laugh thinking about the idea that the conflicts and turmoil had something to do with Communist or anti-Communist. The Africans couldn't care less. They want support. They will take it from anybody. Their whole concern is tribal. The entities that we refer to as countries are only important to a few leaders. The folks that actually live there could not care less.

Q: Being in the then capital, Leopoldville, you were conscious of the geographic disintegration.

GRAVES: Very much so. There was a huge inflow of immigrants that were not from that region and didn't speak Lingala, which is the language of the army, nor Kicongo, which is the language of the Leopoldville region. That was my first really good lesson on where the conflicts really are centered. In Leopoldville itself, the army regularly gathered up all the immigrants it could find and transported them into the hinterland. The government feared riots, for good reason, and wanted to get all the people out of town that it considered dangerous.

Q: I think I interrupted you when you were starting in on your arrival in Bukavu in 1964 where Bill Schaufele was the consul general and you were working with the Stanleyville hostage situation with Mike Hoyt, who was the consul general in Stanleyville.

GRAVES: Bukavu was involved in the Belgian military operation that eventually freed them, with American support. This was the time of the Mulele uprising. All that I've read

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in the newspapers recently about Rwanda and Burundi and genocide lacks historical perspective. Almost the exact same scenario played out in the 1960s with such bloodshed that the Ruzi River that runs between the eastern Congo and Rwanda ran red.

Q: You saw that?

GRAVES: Yes, I saw hundreds of people killed. Two French friends with the UN were hacked to death in a refugee camp. I had intended to accompany them but was detained by urgent consular business. Shortly before the Mulele horde swept through Bukavu, I led some forty American dependents to Burundi over a road that had been built by the Germans before World War I. I returned to Bukavu the following day to find our cultural center riddled with machine-gun fire and hundreds of bodies in the streets.

Q: How did this extraction go? The Belgians took the lead. Therwere Americans in it. You were with them.

GRAVES: I parachuted into Stanleyville.

Q: You parachuted with the extraction forces?

GRAVES: Not literally. Because I knew the road, I traveled part of the way in a jeep with a bunch of newsmen. The actual assault was over before we arrived.

Q: So, by the time you hit the ground, the actual military operatiowas probably ended, the hostages were just freed.

GRAVES: Right, and they were all alive.

Q: How many were there?

GRAVES: Maybe nine, but that could be wrong.

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Q: Then you took them under your wing to get them out of the country. How did that go? How long had they been held?

GRAVES: It was quite a while, several weeks. I was the last American out of Stanleyville before it was taken. For want of better, I had had my car shipped from Leopoldville to Stanleyville via the river. From that point on, to get it to Bukavu, I had to drive it. I flew to Stanleyville with my eldest son and we drove the car, not knowing how close the Mulele were, not knowing that only an hour or two after each of our stops for gas, each place was wiped out and most of the people were killed.

Q: Could you see the tension?

GRAVES: Not really. There was a lot of confusion and conflicting reports. It was certainly crazy to be driving through the eastern Congo at that point, but we weren't aware of how dangerous it was until we got to Bukavu. Bukavu was overrun and we had to evacuate all dependents. My family stayed in Burundi and then afterwards in Kampala. I stayed in Bukavu through the whole rebellion. By that time, Schaufele had gone and Dick Matheron had taken over as consul. He was away at one point and I was in charge, which gave me another jolting insight into a world I didn't know. The CIA station chief was injured and had to be evacuated. People kept coming in out of the bush. CIA assets. Some of them, like missionaries, I was really staggered that they were working for the CIA and considered that I personally had to get them out of the Congo and that I was responsible. I also had the funny experience of the CIA being stuffy. When a couple of CIA technicians finally got back into Bukavu, they considered that I had no business in their section of the consular building. I listened to all their guff and finally said, "Fine, when you think you need your tumblers for the code system, which I happen to have in my pocket, come down and see me." After a few hours, they came down to see me with a different attitude.

Q: Before your family was evacuated, you had had some time in Bukavu before the thing deteriorated. What was that like? What was day to day life like?

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GRAVES: Splendid. It's probably the most beautiful place in the whole wide world. Bukavu is on the tip of Lake Kivu, which is 100 and some miles long with a live volcano near Goma. In those days, no one really knew how deep it was, five or six thousand feet. Cold, cold water.

To fly into Bukavu was a problem. You had to climb to a minimum of 13,000 feet to get through the pass and then drop down to the lake level of 5,000 feet and land on what really was a flattened off tip of a mountain covered with pine and cedar. It's beautiful and almost everything grows there. At lake level where we lived, we had all the citrus fruit in our yard. You could go down, walk for 15 minutes, and you would be down where there were bananas and pineapple. You could walk up 15 minutes and there would be apples and cherries. The soil was rich, broken down lava. The climate couldn't have been more beautiful. It was cool and very pleasant.

Q: You were in charge of USIA operations there for a year.

GRAVES: Right. During that time, the place was overrun twice by the Mulele uprising. In each case, there were hundreds of people killed.

Q: So, you were really dragooned into doing any kind of work to support the consulate. It wasn't possible to do strictly USIA work.

GRAVES: No, it wasn't. I think we pretty well lost the idea that one was assigned to a particular job. We just didn't have time to think about those things.

Q: It was probably a six person post?

GRAVES: Two USIS, Paul Polakoff and I. In the consulate, there was the consul and a junior officer. There was also the CIA station chief. In addition, there were various TDY: American military, including two colonels, and various technicians.

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Q: Did Ambassador Godley get out to check on you?

GRAVES: No, we had to fly to Leopoldville to see him.

Q: After a year there, they figured you were an Africanist and sent you on to Madagascar.

GRAVES: Madagascar in those days was one of the most pleasant places in the world. After the Congo, I guess Washington figured I deserved a little rest.

Q: So, you were there resting from 1965 to 1967.

GRAVES: Right. It was a very pleasant experience indeed. I worked hard, but it was certainly a good life. I have nothing but good memories. Sad now. Madagascar has made a mess of its economy. When I was there, it was a large exporter of rice. Now people are starving.

Q: It was an extraordinary mixture of African and Asian and had its own island culture.

GRAVES: Right. Even though it's off the coast of Africa, the primary population is Polynesian or Indonesian. The Polynesians were undoubtedly the greatest sailors that ever lived. They managed to sail east clear to Hawaii even though for generations they didn't dare sail beyond the point where the familiar sky changed. Sailing in the other direction, they must have stopped in India where they adopted hump-backed cattle before moving on to discover Madagascar. The basic population of Madagascar is Polynesian, so much so that when we invited President Tsiranana to the United States, including Hawaii, the USIA film of his visit shows him counting in Malagasy and a Hawaiian counting in Hawaiian and the words are almost identical.

Q: Was that your idea to send him to Hawaii?

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GRAVES: In part. We wanted to show the relationship. It certainly worked wonders. We had the film, which we showed in Madagascar, confirming the relationship between Americans and Malagasy.

Q: Were there any real U.S. interests there? What was our mission?

GRAVES: Yes. The major interest was the NASA tracking station. Madagascar happens to be the first spot where it's possible to confirm the orbit when spacecraft are launched from Florida. So the station was very important. We had to convince the French, who were very influential, and the Malagasy that it was in their interest to participate in the admirable human experience of exploring space. We were busy selling that. I was often on radio. When I arrived there, they immediately took me out to this station. I was on Voice of America (VOA), in French, reporting from the station. Always when you go on radio, you say "This is John Graves reporting from...." Malagasy names are very long, often as many as 20 letters. I looked at the name of the place where the station was located but I couldn't pronounce it. I finally said, "Near Antananarivo." My colleagues all had a big laugh. The following week, when I went on the VOA again, I pronounced "Imerintsiatosika" like a native.

Q: What was the embassy like and the interaction between USIA (or USIS, as it's called abroad) and the embassy? Do you recall the ambassador or some of the people there then?

GRAVES: There was a political ambassador named King, a Mormon. The relationship between USIS and the rest of the Americans was good. Probably the most important entity was NASA. There were a lot of Americans involved in that. It certainly was one of the chief reasons for our being in Madagascar.

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Q: Coming from such career ambassadors as Ed Gullion and Mac Godley and as the preeminent French speaker in Madagascar, how was it working with your first political ambassador? Were there different strengths and weaknesses?

GRAVES: Before the political ambassador, there was a career ambassador who had great personal problems. He probably was an excellent staff person who shouldn't have been put in charge of anything. He had a serious drinking problem and was removed. Then we had the political ambassador. I didn't find him particularly difficult. As so many Mormons, he had done a year or two of missionary work in France, so he spoke French and wasn't greatly handicapped in that respect.

Q: Before we leave Madagascar, is there anything that we haven't touched on that you would like to?

GRAVES: Only the question which is the most important concern I have in talking with you, our long period of obsessive anti-Communism. It's not that I have any illusion that Communism is workable. It might be workable in a Heaven populated with angels, but it's not a practical option with human beings, human nature being what it is. You're not going to be able to produce turnips, corn, or whatever in the Communist system. No incentive. People, even if they're idealists, will soon give up really producing. Nonetheless, I was concerned always, even disgusted, with many of my colleagues who were obsessed with anti-Communism. The only motivation guiding our foreign policy all those years was anti-Communism. That was all that really counted. All the rest was secondary or mere window dressing.

Communism is of course a disaster as the recent history of Madagascar clearly documents. When I was in Madagascar most people had a pretty good life and economically the country was doing quite well under the tutorship of the French. But after my departure, leaders from the coastal areas like President Tsiranana were forced out by the Merinas (people of the high central plateau, mostly of Polynesian descent) who

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had been the rulers before the French arrived. (When independence came to French Africa, the French managed to install Africans who lacked a major base of power and were therefore amenable to French guidance.) Madagascar and the Malagasy certainly were much better off when we left there than they are now. When the Merinas took power they understandably wanted to reduce French influence and therefore called on the Russians for help and guidance. Ratsiraka's policies destroyed the economy, especially rice production.

Communism everywhere fails to produce because it fails to take into account human nature. What happened in Russia was simply that the economy finally got so bad that something had to give. It wasn't our obsessive anti-Communism that beat the Communists. The system itself just doesn't work. We didn't need to cuddle up to and support really despicable dictators. Marcos in the Philippines, the Shah in Iran, Somoza in Nicaragua. We could have done business with them to the extent that it was in our interests without looking as if we were supporting them. If they managed to stay in power, we should have made clear that it was not because of our support. Foolish on our part to think we had to fight Communism by any means instead of seeing that we would do better being true to ourselves and our values.

Q: Thinking about Africa, don't you think that there are so many countries, such as Liberia or Sierra Leone, that have fared so badly where Communism seemed to have little to do with it and then thinking about the countries we've been talking about (Congo and Madagascar), how much really should we attribute to the Communist pattern, the socialist model, as the root of their failings?

GRAVES: I think the countries that had very leftist regimes fared worse. The problem is deep. All of us were optimistic in the 1960s. We thought we could be helpful and do something useful in Africa. Not just the Americans, but other countries, really thought they knew how to support and to promote and make Africa and Africans viable. Experience showed how wrong we were. Or as Walt Kelly's Pogo, playing the role of Julius Caesar

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reporting from the war had it: "We have met the enemy and he is us." If Africa is poor and chaotic because of its history, climates and cultures, maybe only the Africans themselves can improve matters. I simply don't know what we could do that really would be helpful to Africa and Africans. I know that what we did in the past has not been successful. Some of it was sincere and some was not. The Peace Corps, I admired a great deal even though the long-term impact was probably slight. Our AID programs, I admired a good deal less. Too often, AID helped American businessmen, especially American farmers, rather than Africa. The answer to your question is, no, I don't know. I'm very sorry to say that I spent 12 years in black Africa and I don't know what we can or could have done that would have been really helpful.

Q: In critiquing the anti-Communist bias of our policy in those years, are you thinking mostly ideologically or also reflecting on on-the-ground competition with the Soviets and Soviet embassies? Did you see that in Madagascar and in Congo?

GRAVES: No, I didn't know the Russians well in either place. Later on, I knew them very well indeed. I had drinks with them at banquets and played volleyball. It was in Mali that I first knew the Russians. It wasn't the Russians that I knew that bothered me so much as my fellow Americans, Foreign Service people, Washington, the American press, and their obsession with anti-Communism. I remember once being on radio and television when I came back to the US. from some country and a lady calling in to say, "You don't understand, young man. The Communists are evil, evil!" she shrieked. A kind of religious fervor. No leavening humor as when President Roosevelt allowed as how, "Somoza is a bastard, but he's our bastard." The image we created in the world just wasn't in our interests.

Q: Talking about anti-Communism, they must have figured you had done your quiet period in Madagascar. You were transferred in 1967 as a provincial advisor in Vietnam.

GRAVES: I was actually seconded to the Army and paid by USAID.

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Q: Was that an assignment that you sought?

GRAVES: Absolutely not. I did everything I could to avoid it.

Q: You got a cable one day in Antananarivo.

GRAVES: I got a cable and a phone call. I said, "No, I'm not going." So I got another phone call. I could see that my choice really was to resign and go back to the academic world or go to Vietnam. I didn't want to go to Vietnam, not because I had any objection at that point to our intervention or our policies. I knew almost nothing about Vietnam. I had been completely concerned with Africa and with my own life and family and didn't have any strong feelings about Vietnam.

Q: So, you couldn't fight the assignment. You went back for some Vietnamese training or went straight out?

GRAVES: Direct transfer. I had absolutely no training. I simply was sent to Saigon, where I spent a couple of weeks in briefings.

Q: First relocating your family in the States?

GRAVES: No, my family stayed in Madagascar. They were comfortable there. One of the conditions was, if I was going to Vietnam, I didn't want them moved. Several were in secondary school and wanted to finish their schooling, which had been mostly in French schools.

Q: So, for all of the elaborate Vietnam program training, you had direct transfer virtually.

GRAVES: Completely. I simply was moved directly from Antananarivo, Madagascar to Saigon.

Q: So, you arrived in Saigon in 1967 and then what?

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GRAVES: I had several weeks of briefings and met top officials, listened to their programs and evaluations.

Q: Top officials being Henry Cabot Lodge?

GRAVES: Cabot Lodge was soon replaced by Bunker but more important in terms of my assignment were General Westmoreland and Robert Komer.

Q: Komer was the deputy responsible for the provincial...

GRAVES: Responsible for the infamous Phoenix Program, which I knew nothing about. I was selected to be the equivalent of governor of a province. The main reason I was assigned to Vietnam had to do with my experience with terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Also my French, which would enable me to easily communicate with Vietnamese officials. Spending a year or two in Vietnamese training got you almost nowhere. To learn to speak Vietnamese usefully, you have to be very gifted for language learning and very motivated. There are of course no intrinsically hard languages. But Vietnamese is far removed from English, far from European languages. For starters, the tonal system is difficult for a Westerner to cope with. For example, the act of asking a question where we use the same words as in a statement but with an intonation which indicates a question. Imagine a language where you can change the same basic word to three or four very different meanings by changing tonal relationships.

Q: Were you then with other provincial advisors designate, the Fran Wisners, Paul Hares, and Dick Holbrookes of that time?

GRAVES: Wisner was in Saigon when I got to know him. He was one of the few Americans who seemed to have some understanding of Vietnam. Most of the Americans who briefed me, especially the military, parroted the party line. Aggression from the North and the evils of Communism. I learned to avoid these people. They were of no use to me. I eventually ended up in Rach Gia, capital of Kien-giang, part of the Delta of the Mekong on

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the coast of the Gulf of Siam, The northern part borders on Cambodia; the southern part was in the hands of the Viet Cong. What with other enclaves, I was in a province where something like half was Viet Cong.

Q: This was the year before Tet.

GRAVES: The Tet Offensive occurred right after the end of my stathere.

Q: What did you find when you got to your province?

GRAVES: The reason I had such a singular experience was that when I was assigned to Rach Gia I had to meet with the regional chief in Can Tho, my immediate American boss. I was also advised to let Can Tho hire me a Vietnamese interpreter-advisor-counselor. The people that Can Tho proposed had never set foot in my province. None of them could really speak French. They were young. They spoke very broken, very useless English. One of the reasons Americans did so badly in Vietnam was that they had no real communication with the Vietnamese. The best possible thing would be to have Americans who really could speak Vietnamese. The next best thing would be to have people who could really speak French. The top layer in Vietnam all talked (even with each other) in French. So when Can Tho presented me with a candidate, I asked, "Why should I hire him? How would he be of any use to me?"

When I got to Rach Gia, I hired a man who had just retired from the civil service. He had been in the French civil service for perhaps 20 years and then the Vietnamese civil service until mandatory retirement. Mr. Vinh proved to be a first-rate human being and an incredible source of information once I learned to ask open-ended questions. This is very important, especially with Asians. Never give them a hint as to what the answer should be. I learned a great deal about Vietnam, the Vietnamese, and what was really going on. A big mistake insofar as my career was concerned.

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Q: How did that picture you were putting together differ from what you had gotten in your Saigon briefings?

GRAVES: Probably best to begin with black humor. Our body count reports which proved we were winning. Art Buchwald had a lot of fun with that. Custer's last stand. His body count reports show he is winning the battle, but the only American left is poor Custer and he's wounded.

One of the things I soon learned was that our maps showing what territory was secure didn't have much to do with reality. We were surrounded and infiltrated by the Viet Cong. There were few really safe villages in Kien-giang. I also learned that had there been an election, as was promised, in south Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh would have won hands down. Even Vietnamese who would certainly lose everything including their lives, if the Viet Cong won out, didn't dispute the fact that Ho Chi Minh was the most popular leader in Vietnam. In any kind of election, he would have won. So it's not surprising that successive governments in Saigon had little standing, prestige, or power, and even less ability to administer and govern. We were backing what was essentially a dead horse, and it was getting more and more expensive to maintain the illusion that our horse was in the running.

I also had misgivings about Komer's Phoenix Program which began with the plausible premise that there were traitors in the South Vietnamese administration, army, and village hierarchies who should be eliminated. This sounds reasonable enough at first look, but when you bump up against the reality of how and by whom the condemned are designated, it gets uncomfortable. Rivalries, petty quarrels, family feuds, or even schemes to take over the position or land of someone. No real safeguards against mistaken or malevolent accusations. No trial, no proof, no defense. A group of black pajama types just goes in and kills the accused traitor.

Q: Americans?

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GRAVES: Americans and Vietnamese together, always with the American leading.

Q: And you observed that at work in your own province.

GRAVES: I was called in and thoroughly briefed by Komer, who wanted each province advisor to understand what the program was and why it was and why we had to support it. We didn't have to be directly involved in it, just know that it was happening and to take advantage of it each time there was a strike.

Q: Were any of their actions based on information from provincial advisors such as you, intelligence?

GRAVES: Almost none.

Q: How did they get their information?

GRAVES: I personally think that some of it was settling accounts, vengeful Vietnamese. I have no reason to believe that accusing information was well-founded. I just don't think that our intelligence was good enough to pinpoint many important traitors, maybe the little chislers, but the really important people, I don't think so.

Q: In a province such as yours, one of maybe 30 provinces in Vietnam?

GRAVES: I've forgotten how many there were.

Q: A large number. What scale are we talking about in this?

GRAVES: Probably hundreds assassinated.

Q: You became conscious of this in your year there?

GRAVES: Right. People disappeared, were killed. Also, some torture was used. You could argue that it was justified, that we had to get information, but the information was often

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superficial. We were busy picking off the fringes. Obviously, it didn't work very well. The Tet offensive proved beyond doubt that South Vietnam was mined with tunnels full of Viet Cong and their stockpiles. In my province, the only areas not subject to Viet Cong influence were Catholic. The Catholics had come down from the North and settled after the 1954 settlement. They were profoundly anti-Viet Cong, anti-Communist. But they were the only group, the only villages which fought off Viet Cong infiltration. But they weren't pro-Saigon either. On the contrary, they detested the Saigon officials who were often corrupt, rapacious schemers. The Catholics listened to their priests rather than to Saigon officials or American do-gooders. They were the only group that I considered really hostile to the Viet Cong. All the rest were frightened, or didn't care or were sympathetic to the Viet Cong because they were against the foreigners.

Q: Some of your fellow provincial advisors considered their service in that role as the high point of responsibility or power in their career.

GRAVES: John Vann is a good example.

Q: How did you feel about it in those terms? What did you find there in terms of staff? What was your role and daily life?

GRAVES: Most of my staff (some 160) were American military. One of the things that really shocked me was that discipline in the Foreign Service was much better than in the military. The military were not prepared to do a lot of things. They were not prepared to take orders in the way that my Foreign Service officers were.

Q: There were senior military at the lieutenant colonel/colonel level under your authority?

GRAVES: Right. In fact, the lieutenant colonel who was my deputy became a very close and good friend.

Q: How did the military people like that take to this French-speaking academic?

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GRAVES: They didn't. Worse than that, they were not prepared to do certain things or stop doing certain things. For example, our reconnaissance planes were armed with rockets. After they had done their reconnaissance, they would dump the rockets on so-called "free fire zones." I happened to be in a free fire zone when a plane dropped its load and saw what happened. So I prohibited all such gratuitous attacks and immediately found myself in a near mutiny.

Q: Casualties to Vietnamese civilians that you saw.

GRAVES: Right. I was in the midst of it and saw men, women and children maimed and killed. People I had come to talk with and try to understand. People we wanted to take a stand against Viet Cong infiltration. When I got back to Rach Gia, I was pretty angry. There was absolutely no reason to dump rockets on that village. Hard to imagine anything more counterproductive in terms of our goals. But the military had a kind of "shoot 'em up" attitude that was hard to control. My deputy, a lieutenant colonel, was not at all in sympathy with such gratuitous attacks. We saw eye to eye but never succeeded in getting whole-hearted cooperation from the real gunslingers. My deputy even ruefully admitted that he was more sure that a Foreign Service officer would do what he was told than a military, who might protest and invoke his rights. Alas, many latter-day Foreign Service officers seem to have adopted the attitude of my military in Vietnam.

Q: I am understanding that you were then basically in charge of a group of about 160, mostly military, but including Foreign Service personnel. Nothing in the previous assignments we've been discussing had seemed to prepare you for that kind of management experience. What was it like suddenly?

GRAVES: I was confronted with problems which I had never seen before. I had to really listen to my more experienced staff. Then improvise and make mistakes. AID logistics (most of my civilians were AID), I knew nothing about. For example, tons of concrete. How to prevent it from being stolen or destroyed in leaky warehouses. How to get it distributed

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to villages participating in our projects. Much of it was waylaid by venal officials. A new experience for me, learning how difficult it is to give anything away effectively. Another example where I began without a clue. Our military were running patrols, but I couldn't make out what the goal or object of these "walks in the sun" was. They seemed to be "shoot 'em up" operations, revenge for all the casualties we were taking.

Q: Casualties occurring mostly on patrols?

GRAVES: Many, but all of us who traveled the roads risked land mines. I couldn't see how groups of armed Americans tramping around in rice paddies or ransacking villages was going to pacify South Vietnam and garner support for Saigon. Westmoreland's idea was that our presence be declared, repeated and emphasized. He came to Rach Gia several times to talk with us. The man was very conscientious. He even asked some good questions. In many respects he was admirable and straightforward, sort of a grown up boy scout. But he had little understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Not his cup of tea. I suppose he saw the war as a chess game rather than a problem of winning over a very foreign people to our values. In any case, I didn't see where there was much hope that he would come to see that what he was doing had little chance of promoting American interests.

Interesting question, "What was the American interest in Vietnam?" We normally define American interests in terms of security, trade, culture and family relations. In the case of Ireland or Israel, for example, American interest has to do with the fact that a great many Americans have Irish or Jewish origins. Then there is strategic interest. Oil in the Middle East, Central America's proximity. Finally, trade, which contributes to our interest in Canada or Japan. None of these criteria obtain in the case of Vietnam itself, but the domino theory had it that if Vietnam fell to the Communists, we would suffer a major strategic setback. When I was in Vietnam, I more or less accepted the idea that the domino theory was valid. But my daily experience gradually forced me to conclude that our programs and tactics were never going to pacify my province. And I began to wonder

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how long the American public would go along with the Westmoreland syndrome of bringing in ever more American soldiers and taking ever more casualties. Privately some of my colleagues in Saigon and in other provinces began to wonder along with me.

Q: Who were some of the others who, in your view, saw clearly?

GRAVES: One that comes to mind immediately is Frank Wisner. He was well informed and skeptical. There were a few who resigned. Most just served out their assignment and departed.

Q: As you described what you were doing, a lot of the activities under your control were in contradiction with each other: the patrols to assert presence, and then on the other hand the food distribution and the AID activities. Those contradictions, with time, seemed to become more and more apparent to you.

GRAVES: Not so much the contradictions, but I couldn't see how our programs and projects were ever going to pacify Kien-giang. I remember Westmoreland asking me point blank if we had made progress in the last month. I answered, "I don't think we're any worse off than we were six months ago, but we're no better off either."

Q: Measured in terms of area of control?

GRAVES: Security? That was what mattered. What part of Vietnam was secure and under the auspices of the Saigon government and, therefore, the Americans. I said, quite frankly, I couldn't see where we had made any progress in the last six months. Westmoreland was unhappy with my answer. I was saying that our people were being killed to no good effect.

Q: Did you have civilian congressional, other fact finders?

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GRAVES: Almost every day. One of the reasons I got into trouble was that I finally decided that I just didn't have time to deal with all those visitors. A never ending succession of congressmen, senators, journalists.

Q: Harvard professors like Henry Kissinger.

GRAVES: There were professors, politicians and bureaucrats aplenty. They would turn up and think they merited my full attention for the whole day.

Q: In your province?

GRAVES: Right.

Q: But getting there, having been cleared by somebody. GRAVES: Right.

Q: On their own military aircraft.

GRAVES: The CIA ran an airline in Vietnam. I would get a telegram saying that, for example, Joe Alsop was coming to visit tomorrow and expected me to stay with him the whole damn day.

Q: How did he take it when you didn't?

GRAVES: It was shortly after Alsop's visit when I decided that I was going to say "No" and see what happened. My superiors were unhappy that I was saying "No" to many people, "no, I don't have time to meet and greet this man." Besides, it was too dangerous. For example, we had a well-known senator from the Middle West who was prominent in the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. He came out and I got a call from Westmoreland who said, "John, show him the war." The reason he called was that, unlike in many of the other Delta provinces, the Viet Cong controlled large areas of Kien-giang and you could be sure of getting into a fire fight if you ventured into those areas. There was an area called the "Three Sisters." Low mountains. So I foolishly took the Senator into the Three Sisters in a

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helicopter, escorted by two other helicopters, all heavily armed. We got shot down. This was instant worldwide news.

Q: You and he were in the helicopter?

GRAVES: Right. The other helicopters protected us but we had to establish a perimeter so one of them could land and evacuate us. I had military training. So I grabbed a machine gun to help establish the perimeter. No time to look after the Senator.

Q: When you say "military training," you had done a tour in the Navy in 1945-1946.

GRAVES: Yes, but I also had training in the Congo and in Vietnam, so I knew how to use an M-16, grenades, and machine guns.

Q: So, you were on the ground with the congressman and were eventually extracted.

GRAVES: Right. But his pants suffered greatly.

Q: Having risked lives on instruction to show him the war.

GRAVES: Stupid on my part. He was embarrassed about his messed pants and furious with me until we got to Can Tho and he realized that he was worldwide media. Then he was very pleased that he had been shot down. A war hero for the folks back home.

Q: You mentioned as the boss taking many losses in your group in this. How did that sit with you?

GRAVES: It was a chore I wasn't any good at. I let my deputy do most of it. But he was away at one point on leave in the U.S. and I had to do it all. Presiding over our ceremonies in honor of dead comrades and writing to their families to say they had not died in vain, that they had been protecting and sacrificing for our country and all of that, which I just didn't believe and couldn't easily express. I had to preside over body bags and say

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things that I didn't believe. Sometimes, I knew the man well, knew his views, a friend and comrade who didn't believe in what I had to say over his remains. That, I think, was one of the hardest things I had to cope with when I was in Vietnam. We had casualties and deaths and we had to deal with their families.

Q: You were yourself living in a military security cocoon of day tday existence, no?

GRAVES: No, in a pleasant villa presided over by a great Vietnamese cook. But I didn't trust the ARVN (Vietnamese army) to protect me there in the center of town, even though I was on good terms with the Vietnamese colonel commanding all ARVN troops in Kien Giang. The colonel, who enjoyed talking to an American in plain French, did not disagree with my judgment. So I hired Cambodian guards and stationed them up on my roof. I didn't want them out in front where any Viet Cong assault team coming in would immediately conclude that my house was a place to attack because it was being guarded. There was nobody in front of my house. But my armed Cambodians were behind sand bags on the roof every night.

Q: Was your office ever subject to this?

GRAVES: Our office building was shot up by rockets. I have a photo of my battered desk sitting there with the walls around it blown away. If I had been upstairs at my desk, I wouldn't be talking to you now, but I was down below participating in the shoot-out.

Q: You mentioned that Tet occurred.

GRAVES: The Tet offensive occurred after I was removed from my job. Rach Gia came under extensive attack, which was later described to me by my former deputy. (We were good friends and maintained close contact over the years.)

Q: How did the removal itself play out?

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GRAVES: I was removed because I sent a highly classified message to Washington documenting my observation that we were making no progress overall in pacifying Kien Giang. I was careful to cite only my province where I could see no end to the war and no good coming from what we were doing. I ended by suggesting we reduce our aid to the level which we assumed the Viet Cong and the North were getting from the outside and that if our guys couldn't hack it, that ought to tell us we were backing a dead horse and should therefore get out of Vietnam. Or as the wags had it, declare victory and go home.

Q: That was a courageous message to send.

GRAVES: At first I was commended by Leonard Marks, Director of USIA, who had asked for a frank analysis of what I was seeing in Vietnam.

Q: In sending it, were you aware of what the consequences would be?

GRAVES: No. I was responding to a specific request from my director. A matter of doing my job, but there was also a personal calculation. What with MacNamara's radically new analysis of the war in Vietnam, I figured policy was up for grabs. My analysis and suggestion on how we could exit Vietnam would arrive at just the right moment to help Marks make a big splash in Washington. This could get me promoted. I was elated when I was congratulated for my analysis.

Q: By who?

GRAVES: I got a letter from Marks, head of USIA, expressing his gratitude for my analysis. (See attached photocopy of Marks' letter of commendation.) I assumed he was planning to use it to wade into the high-level policy debate at the White House. A gross miscalculation on my part. MacNamara lost out to the hawks. Johnson remained adamant about Vietnam. No debate, no policy change. Nonetheless it was a good analysis and I hoped that

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someday it would be recognized. (To facilitate finding in archives my report, see attached photocopy of the first page of the report.)

Q: Is it not now already?

GRAVES: No.

Q: Was it a normal thing for provincial advisors to take on the overall picture and offer views on grand strategy?

GRAVES: Of course not, but I sent a copy to my superior in Saigon, Barry Zorthian.

Q: While you were a USIA officer, these were in regular embassy omilitary channels.

GRAVES: Essentially, military channels.

Q: We lost a bit of information when I changed the tape. You wertalking about how reaction to your Vietnam report changed....

GRAVES: In Washington and throughout the country there was great controversy regarding our intervention in Vietnam. MacNamara repudiated his long-standing policies and strategies and concluded the war was not winnable. For a brief moment, it looked as if people who had other ideas might get a hearing. But it turned out that Lyndon Johnson had made his decision regarding the new views of our chief strategist. MacNamara was out.

Q: So, your report played into a larger Washington setting that you had no way of gauging and then it came back down to you from the embassy that you were on your way home.

GRAVES: Right, which is the normal thing in our service, as we alknow.

Q: You had a certain amount of time to wrap up your affairs?

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GRAVES: Dinners and receptions organized in my honor by Vietnamese in Rach Gia. Nothing in Can Tho or Saigon. As quickly as possible, I was shuffled out of Vietnam and back to Madagascar.

Q: As you leave this section of the tape in Vietnam, you had mentioned the rapid promotion cycle of some who were there. Was it your view that the network of people there somehow perpetuated itself later in the Service? One does think of the Tarnoffs, Tony Lakes, Holbrookes, Wisners, and Hares.

GRAVES: It was a jumping off point. Vietnam certainly catapulted Barry Zorthian to fame and fortune. Others got hurt. Some left the Foreign Service. They didn't want to have anything more to do with the U.S. government. As it turned out, those who came to see that our intervention was wrong or at least not in the interest of our country were right. But the people who were essentially right suffered career setbacks and the people who were essentially wrong did very well. The cynical conclusion: officers should play the game, avoiding controversy and trying never to give offense (see "Falstaff au Vi#t-nam" by John Graves, #ditions Tir#sius, Paris, 1994; available Biblioth#que Nationale and in bookshops).

Q: Did you feel within USIA you were from that moment handicapped, or the other way, compensated for having gone through a tough time?

GRAVES: Once back in Washington, I found myself in quarantine, or as we call it, the corridor corps. No assignment, no prospects of an assignment, no office, and no address except the Foreign Service lounge. Director Marks was not available when I tried to get an appointment. Because it would be upsetting to our children to have a father who didn't have a job, I went off to "the office" every morning, which was mostly museums and libraries. Finally, after six months in limbo, a well-placed friend was able to quietly spirit me off to Lom#, Togo as public affairs officer.

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Q: What was the reaction of your colleagues in that six month period? Were you a pariah, a hero? Did people shuffle by you in the corridors?

GRAVES: Many hardly said hello when they ran into me in the corridors. Others expressed sympathy and quickly moved on. A few invited me to lunch and assured me they were doing what they could to get me an assignment.

Q: So, you're off then to Lomé, Togo from 1968-1970 as public affairs officer. It was a small post, but the first time you had your own USIS operation.

GRAVES: In Bukavu I was public affairs officer, but that was a branch post. You're right. Togo was a good experience. The ambassador and the DCM were excellent officers. I was lucky to have the chance to learn from them.

Q: Togo was a sophisticated francophone success story while Dahomey, now Benin, was the opposite. Those two have since reversed. Is that a fair reading?

GRAVES: I don't think Togo has become a basket case. I wouldn't contrast it so much with Dahomey, which, as you suggested, was then suffering great political unrest and economic dislocation. In Lomé the immediate neighbor was Ghana, which, thanks to Nkrumah's far left dogma, was a disaster. So we watched and laughed when Ghanaians, who had been rich and arrogant in the Gold Coast before independence, tried to continue bamboozling the Togolese. But the relationship between the Togolese and the Ghanaians had changed. The Togolese had a solid economy, a stable regime and French advisors while the Ghanaians were wretched. Togo became a large exporter of cocoa, even though there wasn't a tree in the country, because cocoa from Ghana was fleeing a rapacious Marketing Board which didn't pay producers anywhere near the world price for cocoa. The producers were skinned in favor of the city folks and the politicians, who sold it abroad at world market prices. But the farmers, the people who were working, didn't get enough to

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make the effort worthwhile. So they either stopped working or figured out ways to export their cocoa through neighboring Togo.

Q: Togo was a very francophone one party African state.

GRAVES: Right. President Olympio was murdered. He managed to crawl over the wall and into the American embassy to die.

Q: Was that in your time?

GRAVES: No. Colonel Eyadema was president when I arrived. We were probably wrong to be as friendly to Eyadema as we were. I'm not suggesting that we try to undermine or tear down or change governments. But it's not in our interest to be visibly promoting or supporting or in cahoots with unsavory governments and leaders.

Q: We were not in any way attempting to undermine Olympio.

GRAVES: On the contrary. He was anti-Communist so we supported him. We should have been neutral and distant, making it clear that the tribal conflict which brought Olympio down was an African affair.

Q: These actual events were before you arrived.

GRAVES: The murder of Olympio occurred before my arrival.

Q: Did you have the impression that Eyadema's coup caught us and the French flat footed?

GRAVES: Eyadema presented us with policy problems. We considered that he may have personally killed Olympio, whom we rather liked and supported. I don't think we did the right thing. We were consistently wrong in thinking that we had to be either for or against Eyadema. We could have remained neutral, making it clear we didn't condone what had happened to Olympio, we didn't support Eyadema and his military government. But making

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it equally clear that we were not going to do anything to scuttle Eyadema. Togo is a very small country. We could have risked being true to our values without risking great loss.

Q: Not that we in that country at that time were a major player, but the French surely were. How did they scan it? How much did their action affect our policy?

GRAVES: I don't know, but I can say that the French ended up being supportive of Eyadema. What they most cared about was business as usual. French policy makers probably had a tougher row to hoe than we Americans. They had to take into account not only the views of their anti-Communists and their colonial businessmen, but they also had to cope with the anti-colonial views of France's powerful far left. The resulting policies oftentimes were complicated and contradictory. On balance, however, I would say that Jacques Foccart's Machiavellian realism determined French policy in Africa.

Q: As such a strong French speaker, what were your own relations there with the French embassy and in general with the French over the years?

GRAVES: Many good friends and close relationships. My wife was a good counterbalance, good at developing relationships with English speakers. Our six children are all francophone because they had most of their primary and secondary schooling in French or Belgian schools, but they admired America and got on well with American children on holiday at post. The French invited us into their homes and welcomed us into their social and recreational clubs. I even ended up being president of one. When one of our children became ill or had an accident, we didn't rely on State Department doctors. The French military and medical system was readily available to us. Their doctors would come immediately to our house when we needed help but always refused to accept any honorarium.

The French had something like civil war going at the Quai (foreign office). They probably gave with one hand and took away with the other and thereby created some of the

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disorder in Africa. Their functionaries did not see eye to eye. Then there was the overriding concern which had to do with French prestige in the world, the grandeur of de Gaulle.

Q: Bud Sherer was a very distinguished ambassador with a gooreputation. That must have been a collegial country team to be part of.

GRAVES: It was. I couldn't agree more. He was one of the princes of the Foreign Service. Realistic and frank, well informed and hard working, but not at all convinced he always knew the right answer. A delightful sense of humor. Caring and concerned about his staff.

Q: Before we leave Togo for Yaound#, is there anything we haven'touched on and should?

GRAVES: The Togolese were always seen by the French as the most able Africans and were used as functionaries throughout black Africa. My experience in Togo confirmed the French evaluation. I had never seen black Africans that were so enterprising and clever. I was tempted to cable Washington: Don't assign any dumb Americans to Lom# because the Togolese will run circles around them and make off with the kitchen sink.

Q: So, that was a direct transfer to Yaound#?

GRAVES: As I recall, yes.

Q: What was the situation there? Cameroon had a split British and French colonial history and languages.

GRAVES: Like Togo. All of the Cameroon was German in the colonial period. But the part that, after World War I, went to France was much larger than the part that went to the British. Americans tend to exaggerate the role of the Anglophone part of Cameroon.

Q: So, you were there with Ambassador Lew Hoffacker.

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GRAVES: Right. I knew him well because we worked together in the Congo. By the way, our ambassador resident in Yaounde# was also ambassador to Equatorial Guinea.

Q: Before we come to the Equatorial Guinea episode, let's talk a little bit about the Cameroon tour, how you found it, how it differed from Togo, what the problems were, what the embassy's interests and scope were.

GRAVES: First, it was a much bigger country and a much bigger American operation. Secondly, the ethnic differences were more striking, the north being Muslim. President Ahidjo was from the North and Muslim. The French, when the colonial period moved into independence, usually worked it out so that the new leader was from a minority group and therefore needed French support. Ahidjo I found charming and reasonable. I sometimes went with Hoffacker to talk with him. But I knew Paul Biya, his private secretary, better because we played tennis together. (For me, tennis was a good source of contacts; I often played with Zack Noah who became a good friend while his son Yannick played with one of my sons who also became a tennis professional.) Biya eventually took over as President when Ahidjo was out of the country and supposedly dying. A victim of skullduggery. When he discovered he wasn't dying, he tried to come back. I think ever since then it's been downhill for Cameroon, which from an economic standpoint had good possibilities. It didn't have the huge amounts of oil which destroyed incentive and productive enterprise in Algeria and Nigeria. In the case of Cameroon, oil came late and gradually so the Cameroonians continued with their other economic activities, including agriculture. When I was there, it was upbeat in the sense that people had the impression that things were getting better. The important thing for human beings is to have the impression that things are getting better, not worse.

Q: *We had a fairly substantial AID involvement. It was a largcountry.*

GRAVES: Yes, but it wasn't a huge AID program. The country was doing quite well. We also had business interests. I especially remember one that Hoffacker had to treat with

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Ahidjo. Africans tend to take on grueling jobs for a specific reason like acquiring a bike. When they have enough money, they disappear, often claiming illness or a death in the family. American bosses do not take kindly to this lack of reliability. But, under the French labor laws adopted by Cameroon, workers cannot just be fired. The procedures and indemnities are burdensome. The Cameroonians rightly claimed the pineapple plantation was violating the law. We had our problems, but by and large, it was a pleasant three years.

Q: Was USIA in a post like that in those years commercially orientein its outreach? Were you conscious of that as a theme?

GRAVES: No, not much. It was still lip service. The name of the game was anti-Communism, which was an error. We should have been more supportive of American business.

Q: The thrust continued to be anti-Communism.

GRAVES: Right. This was 1970-1973. What really mattered waanti-Communism.

Q: Other than the Equatorial Guinea episode, which we'll shortly come to, were there any other highlights of that tour or things you want to put on the record?

GRAVES: There was a funny episode with Ambassador Moore, who succeeded Hoffacker. Moore was an experienced career officer and a first-rate human being. Like any good ambassador, he wanted to know his country, not just the capital, but also the hinterland. We had a military attach# and a military aircraft, a C-47 at the disposal of the ambassador. The pilot was a jet-jockey ace who didn't understand propeller aircraft. He used to practice landings in Yaound#. Lannon Walker, the DCM, and I would make bets about how many times it would bounce before he got it to stay on the runway. The ambassador decided he wanted to visit eastern Cameroon, which is mountainous and prosperous. It's the land of a powerful and enterprising tribe, the Bamileke. The air strip was a flattened off mountain.

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So, you had to hit it early and judge the angle right. The pilot rightly flew over it a couple of times to study the terrain. I had pilot training in the Navy at the end of World War II and had piloted light aircraft in Vietnam. I remember thinking, "You're crazy to be flying with this guy. He'll never land on that." Sure enough, when he hit the strip, the plane bounced. You have really two choices when that happens. If you think you've got enough airspeed, you can gun it. But if you don't have enough airspeed, the plane doesn't fly. It just drops. So if you think you don't have enough airspeed, you put the nose down and you make a bad landing. That's what our pilot decided to do. But he hit the strip at a slight angle and one of the propellers dug into the ground and the motor was torn out of its moorings. Something went by our window. I knew what it had to be. Ambassador Moore, who was a prince, said, "Well, John, we're down safe and sound." I said, "Sir, we are down but not sound. This aircraft isn't going to fly again. I think I saw a motor go by and we're lucky it didn't come through the aircraft. I still have a photo of the ambassador examining the gaping hole where the motor had been mounted.

Q: This is the second crash you've described in your Foreign Service career.

GRAVES: I was in several others.

Q: It must be an unusual landscape which in later years had a mysterious episode with hundreds of unexplained deaths from natural gases.

GRAVES: In Anglophone Cameroon there were mysterious deaths. No one knew for sure what was causing these deaths. But there was speculation that there was deadly gas coming off a lake.

Q: John, I'm sure that one of the focal episodes of your Cameroon tour was the killing in Equatorial Guinea of the second officer in the embassy there by the *chargé* that I know you were very involved in. What was the lead-up to that? Had you visited Equatorial Guinea before or did you have any responsibility for that country?

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GRAVES: No, I had never been to Equatorial Guinea. When we got the first hint that something was amiss in Santa Isabel (now Malabo), Ambassador Hoffacker was on leave in the United States. Lannon Walker was the charg# in Yaound# but he had never visited Equatorial Guinea either.

Q: This is an episode that Ambassador Hoffacker has in his oral history laid out in great detail. Just briefly for readers of this, what happened and then how did you hear about it and get involved?

GRAVES: Lannon Walker asked me to come up to his office to listen to the tape of a radio message sent out by Al Erdos, our charg# d'affaires in Equatorial Guinea. Hoffacker was our accredited ambassador to Equatorial Guinea, which is a very small country.

Q: In the normal course of things, he probably visited every couple of months.

GRAVES: Right. Not much more than that. We first learned there was a crisis in Santa Isabel by listening to the message sent by Erdos via single sideband (the horn, as we called it). Owing to kinky atmospherics, it was picked up and recorded in Accra, Ghana, but not heard in our consulate in Douala, which is only a few kilometers from Santa Isabel. The island of Fernando Poo where Santa Isabel, the capital of Equatorial Guinea, is located is just off the coast of Cameroon. So we got a copy of this message, which was pretty broken up and full of static. Lannon called me. But it was hard to get serious because we were close friends used to trading merry insults and the message appeared to be a hoax. He began by asking, "You know everything that's going on in Africa so what do you make of this?" I listened to the tape and allowed as how I didn't make anything out of it at all. "Who the hell is talking?" We listened to it again. Lannon finally said, "I've already listened to it five times and this is what I think Erdos is saying: The chancery in Santa Isabel is surrounded by Communists and I'm holed up in the strong room with Leahy." That was about all we could make out for sure. There was also something more about Don Leahy, but it wasn't clear what the problem was between them. Lannon finally

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admitted, "I got in touch with Len Shurtleff (our consul in Douala) and he's on his way over there, but he may need help. I've laid on Hans' plane. We're going to Santa Isabel!" "We?" I groaned., "I'm not accredited to Equatorial Guinea and I don't speak Spanish." "Stop moaning, I took Spanish in high school. We're going to Equatorial Guinea."

We tried to get into Santa Isabel but it was closed down for the night. Trucks on the runway. Hans, a guy we knew well, a French commercial pilot who had a heavy Alsatian accent, knew the island. If he couldn't get in, no one could. So we had to wait until the next day.

Q: Shurtleff had already gotten in?

GRAVES: Right. But before we took off for Santa Isabel, Shurtleff reported on the horn that he was in the chancery and Leahy was dead. The Equatorial Guineans, the police and army, were threatening to search the chancery and he was going to have to clear out because the Guineans claimed he wasn't accredited and had no right to be in the chancery.

Q: Shurtleff went first to the residence?

GRAVES: Lannon and I had a tough time getting past airport formalities and into town. After each rebuke, I ribbed Lannon: "Lordy, your Spanish must be even worse than I figured." The taxi driver at the airport wouldn't have anything to do with us so we had to walk until we finally got a ride with an Uruguayan UN technician who spoke good French. He informed us that the local radio was reporting there was a American plot against Equatorial Guinea. He didn't want to take us to the residence because it was opposite the police station. In the streets no one would talk to us so we had trouble finding the residence. Santa Isabel was paranoid. We even had trouble getting Len to let us in to the residence. He was pretty upset.

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After Shurtleff calmed down, he managed to tell us that on landing he had first gone to the residence and then to the chancery with Mrs. Erdos, her little son, and Mrs. Leahy. The place was surrounded by the police and a big crowd. Erdos allowed his wife and child to enter but not Len. He told Shurtleff through the locked door that he had done something terrible and Leahy was dead. The Nigerian ambassador, dean of the diplomats, finally talked Erdos into coming out with his family to take refuge in the Nigerian residence. Shurtleff pushed his way into the chancery, saw Leahy's body and all the blood near the entrance. He bolted for the vault. With the Guineans banging on the door, he managed to get Douala on the horn and report on the situation before he had to clear out.

Q: Shurtleff was the consul in Douala and was a young junior officer?

GRAVES: I don't think Len had ever seen a dead body before. He was in a state when we found him at the residence and we were in a mess. No way to communicate since you had to set up your call with the authorities if you wanted to phone outside Santa Isabel. We didn't even have a car. The ambassador's car was sitting out in front of the chancery and we had the keys for it, but the guards wouldn't let us touch the car or go into the chancery.

The next morning Lannon, the soul of innocence, accosted me with "I've got a great idea, John." "Stop right there! I'm not listening. Every time you have a great idea I end up...." "No, no, you'll love this one. We'll sidle over to the chancery and I'll chat up the guard and block his view of Black Beauty. You slip behind the wheel and take off with the car. "I got a better idea. I'll talk to the guard and you get behind the wheel." "No, no, I speak Spanish. I do the talking" So over we walked to the chancery, arguing all the way. When Lannon was in position he called in English, "Okay, take off, John!" At that point, Lannon's back was to me and the car. He couldn't see there was a gun barrel on my temple and I was trying to ease out of the car with my hands up. "Stop yakking in the wind" I called back, "and come over here and charm the guy with the gun." He turned around, saw the gun, and trotted over to palaver with my new-found buddy, who finally let us leave the premises. No car.

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Q: By this time, you had made contact with Erdos himself in thresidence?

GRAVES: Yes, but remember he and his family were at the Nigerian Ambassador's residence. A fine gentleman who took a lot of time and trouble with a surly Erdos and ran considerable risk for us. Our first problem was to find some kind of transportation and then make contact with our diplomatic colleagues, especially the French, since I happened to know they had a Japanese single sideband that was much better than our American-made horn, which anyway wasn't accessible to us because it was in the chancery. But they had to be careful about transmitting because all means of communicating beyond Santa Isabel without monitoring by the Guineans was illegal. For want of a better means, I finally set off walking, using only French to ask directions to the French embassy every time I encountered a likely looking pedestrian. It was slow work but I finally got to the French chancery. The ambassador wasn't there but the vice-consul was sympathetic and agreed to transmit a message to Yaound#.

Q: They relayed it then to the embassy, who relayed it to thDepartment.

GRAVES: Right. They were very helpful during our long ordeal.

Q: By then, Washington knows. David Newsom, the Assistant Secretarfor Africa, knows that the charge has killed somebody in the embassy.

GRAVES: We didn't really know for sure what had happened. We had to be careful about what we reported. We knew that Leahy was dead and that Erdos seemed to have gone off the deep end. There are a lot of aspects that never came out in the trial where I was a witness. For example, Lannon was napping when we got a phone call, which for once wasn't some guy spouting Spanish, which we of course couldn't understand. The voice said in plain American English, "This is the Secretary." (It seems the Department had a way of automatically dialing and repeating to finally get through, but the connection could

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be cut off at any moment.) I was tired and impatient so I demanded, "The secretary of what?"

Q: *Was it Cy Vance?*

GRAVES: No, the voice said, "this is the Secretary of State." It was Rogers. I stammered, "Yes sir, I'm listening." "Lannon Walker?" he asked. "No sir, John Graves." Then he articulated very carefully, "John, the one thing we don't want to happen out there is an autopsy, don't let anyone touch Leahy's body. Keep it under American surveillance all...." The line went dead. So I waked Lannon and told him I had just had a nice chat with Secretary Rogers. When he finally understood I wasn't just pulling his leg, Lannon was a bit peeved. He kept groaning, "Why didn't you tell me Rogers was on the phone?"

In any case, Washington's obsession with Leahy's body never surfaced at the trial. The Department succeeded in more or less obscuring the fact that the body had been in the hands of the Guinean. But truth be told, we had no idea what was happening to the body during the days it lay rotting in the chancery. When Lannon and I finally flew the body to Douala in Hans' plane, it was in a sealed casket, but we had to go higher than normal because of a storm and the casket blew its seals and smelled to high heaven. Like all tropical zone people, the Cameroonians don't take kindly to letting corpses lie around in the heat. They wanted to burn it on the spot. Lannon managed to get a few hours grace and cabled Washington. A B-52 dropped out of the sky and landed in Douala. (Imagine what it cost Washington, the wheedling and the IOUs, to get the Cameroonians and their French advisors to agree to letting a nuclear-armed B-52 land in Douala.)

Lannon, operator that he is, went with the body to Washington, and I went back to Equatorial Guinea alone. But I kept wondering, why take all this trouble to transport Leahy's body to the U.S.? Then there was the CIA station chief in Yaounde who turned up at the airport when we were getting ready to fly into Santa Isabel the first time. Lots of questions, especially about Leahy. I remember telling him, "This is a great opportunity

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for you. Equatorial Guinea is full of North Koreans, Russians, Chinese. You can take my place and make some great contacts. Meantime, I'll just mosey over to Buea and inspect our post while you're vacationing with the Commie(We had a USIS branch post in English-speaking Cameroon.). Walker intervened to insist the Guineans knew who our colleague was and would never let him in. Out of luck. Still I wondered why our CIA station chief was so interested in Leahy.

Q: So, you went back? GRAVES: Right.

Q: What was your mission going back?

GRAVES: Presence. Hold the fort until Walker managed to phone from the Department with more info or until Ambassador Hoffacker arrived. But shortly after my return, I learned from the French consul that the whole Guinean government and the diplomatic corps were invited to gather in front of our chancery to discuss the merits of invading and searching the embassy. That scared me. Bad enough that they would find our illegal radio and tear gas. Much worse if they broke into the vault and opened the safe to read our classified cables. Macias was paranoid and those telegrams would be enough to get me killed and the whole place burned down.

Q: So, it was that kind of a cleanup rather than by then gettinErdos out of there?

GRAVES: We had managed to get Erdos along with his wife and child to Douala in Hans' plane before carting the body out. They stayed overnight at Shurtleff's house under the auspices of our security officer and then went on, escorted by American marshals, to the U.S. There was a big problem with jurisdiction. Eventually, Erdos was tried in Alexandria, Virginia.

Q: When you went back to Equatorial Guinea the second time, by then, you were the public affairs officer. Word of this incident must have been getting out. Were you besieged with press? How did you handle it?

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GRAVES: No, because the professional press hadn't yet gotten to Douala. There were only stringers. They're easy to deal with. I had already figured out my agency was unlikely to be happy that I was involved in a messy murder case. So I used my diplomatic title of counselor of embassy. Nothing to do with USIS/USIA. I was simply a State Department official briefing docile stringers.

The Department was under pressure to carry out a thorough investigation, but of course wanted to keep the messy facts in house. As experienced diplomats we were used to gathering information and reporting to Washington, but Lannon took the view that we should not play detective and we should be especially cautious about what we reported in writing. We managed to get a Department security type, accompanied by Ambassador Hoffacker, into Santa Isabel. He turned out to be a homosexual specialist. Lannon insisted that we just answer his questions and not volunteer anything. By that time, I had been there long enough to have good contacts and a lot of information about Erdos' friends and personal life. None of it came out at the trial where the drill was, if they don't ask, don't volunteer anything.

Q: When you say you had a lot of information, this is information coming together after this event?

GRAVES: Right. I first went to Equatorial Guinea after the murder.

Q: What I'm asking is, he evidently had a certain reputation from his earlier post (I think it was Mali.). Clearly, Equatorial Guinea is a very demanding post psychologically and not an easy post. Had he been sufficiently vetted in your view in going there or were people not wanting to address this?

GRAVES: Erdos had African experience, spoke Spanish and looked husky and there certainly weren't a lot of candidates clamoring to go to Equatorial Guinea. But after the murder the Department had plenty to worry about. For starters, it turned out that both

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Leahy and Erdos had been on Joe McCarthy's famous list of the 120 homosexuals in the Department of State. (This did not come out at the trial and was never reported in the press.) The Department also had to worry about the Guineans' threat to complain to the UN that the U.S. was plotting to overthrow the Macias regime.

Q: You mentioned before that you were surprised at Secretary Rogers himself calling and saying, "No autopsy." Is the fear here in your view just that this may be a homosexual thing and that reflects badly and it should be kept quiet or was there something else at play?

GRAVES: I just don't know. I'm mystified as to why it was so important and why the U.S. would go to all the trouble of getting a B-52 into Douala. It had to take the White House to get Leahy's body out before it was burned. There were a lot of things that never came out at the trial, such as how we got the body out of Douala and that Secretary Rogers had personally phoned me to insist that no autopsy be performed. At the trial, the testimony of the straight-talking American doctor who finally did the autopsy was amusing. He testified that when he first saw the body, he said immediately to himself, "This is a homosexual murder." He pointed out that there were torture wounds typical of a homosexual murder. There was even a funny dialog when the defense lawyer couldn't quite bring himself to say what he really wanted to bring out so the doctor finally said it for him: Would anybody put his penis in a hostile mouth? The doctor answered his own question with, "In my opinion, no." Since he had already testified that there was semen behind the blood in Leahy's throat, there had been a homosexual act before the murder.

Q: In a very small place like that, surely the diplomatic corps was abuzz. I think you mentioned that the Nigerians and the French had been very cooperative.

GRAVES: The Cameroonians also. Strangely enough, the Conakry Guineans saved our lives. Their Ambassador came down hard on the side of civilized usage. All the ministers and diplomats were in front of the chancery arguing as to whether the Macias government should search the American embassy. The Conakry Guinea ambassador, who was a leftist

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and therefore carried weight with the Equatorial Guineans, dwelled on what was civilized and correct.

Q: So, you wound that up.

GRAVES: No. The Equatorial Guineans didn't care about the murder but they were concerned about the American plot to overthrow Macias and they were also convinced that they had been robbed by the Americans. The famous cocoa scandal. An American and a Ghanaian accomplice had managed to get a whole shipload of cocoa out of the country and never paid for it. The Equatorial Guineans, not being well versed in international affairs, considered that it was the American government and all Americans who were responsible. We owed them about three million dollars. So Lannon and I ended up as informal hostages. All Lannon's fault, naturally. During the crisis, before we got Leahy and Erdos out, Lannon figured we could operate much better if he and I were properly accredited. While I was yakking with the French and Uruguayans, he took our passports over to the Foreign Affairs Ministry. They were swallowed up in the bureaucracy, confiscated. We couldn't get out of Equatorial Guinea. We of course kept cabling our predicament to Washington on one-time pads and painfully deciphering Department messages counseling patience. So we played tennis, fished and wandered around town for days. At one point we had a terrible scare. Lannon was sleeping and I was wandering around town. I saw a ship coming into the harbor flying the stars and stripes. I hustled back to the residence and waked Lannon with, "Hey! I just spotted a way out of this island. "Shut up!" he groaned. "Lannon, there's an American ship coming into the harbor!" "Yipes! we've got stop it. The Guineans will confiscate ship and crew and we'll be stuck here for months doing consular work." We ran for the harbor. It turned out to be Liberian. Lannon formally declared he would strangle me in my sleep.

We couldn't get out of the country without passports. Finally we hit on the idea of dipping into the chancery's consular supplies and issuing ourselves brand new tourist passports. Easier said than done. Like all career officers, we were officially consular officers, although

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we had little practical consular communication or admin training. We had a terrible time with one time pads. We couldn't figure out how to put the lead seals on a proper pouch. There was a special typewriter for passports. Fortunately we both had ID photos in our wallets. We practiced on plain paper and finally managed to do passports one for the other. We went to the airport when Iberia was scheduled to land, figuring that if we got through the formalities Iberia would fly us out. Our big worry was that the gorilla we knew all too well might look at our virgin passports and want to know how we got in without being stamped. Fortunately, he opened them to the page where a ten dollar bill was tucked and happily stamped our exit. When we finally got back to Yaounde, knowing consular services have to account for all passports, we sent them in to Washington with a memo explaining what had happened and why we had issued these passports one to the other, and that we would like to have them back as mementos. Instead, we got back standard forms where all the errors we made were checked off. At the bottom, a note: If you can't do any better than this, you'll have to go back to consular school.

Q: Before we leave Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, have we covered the waterfront of that experience?

GRAVES: I think so.

Q: By my count, you had been in the Foreign Service from 1962 until 1973 without any Washington assignment. So, after Yaounde, it was clearly time for that. You went back in 1973 as chief of USIA's Publications Branch. What was that about and how was the reentry after those many years?

GRAVES: The reentry was a little difficult after all those years, especially for our children who only knew French schools. But the new job was interesting. USIA/Washington published a great many books and magazines. My job was to oversee the whole publication and distribution operation. So I traveled to Mexico city, Bogota, Cairo, Beirut, Tunis, and Paris to oversee the translation and publication of American books. But

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Congress stipulated that they had to be books that were legitimately published in the United States or legitimately published elsewhere with a waiver. This became a great scandal. Among our titles were books that certain groups wanted disseminated, especially the far right, but these books had never been properly published in the United States. So, I had some bad relations with Congress.

One of my great victories was getting the first non-American book on our list. I kept insisting that I didn't know anything that was so much in our favor and so good as the French published book, "Neither Marx Nor Jesus" and that this was exactly the kind of book we ought to be making available all over the world. So we finally disseminated a book that wasn't American and, better yet, wasn't American propaganda. I was very much in favor and happy with the program so long as our titles were legitimate books and not phony, blatant propaganda.

I was in Beirut just before the Lebanese civil war began. My man in Beirut was held hostage. Fortunately I got there in time to get him freed and out of the country, but it was clear to me that our days in Beirut were numbered. Everybody but the ethnic Armenians was armed to the teeth and itching for a shoot-out. We had a huge USIS printing plant in Beirut which cranked our books out in Arabic and French. I tried to move to publishers in Cairo. Without much success.

Q: Cairo also had the Library of Congress operation.

GRAVES: Cairo had a lot of operations even though our library had been closed down for years. I think the Egyptians are the most lovable of Arabs, but they aren't great at cranking out books. So I finally had to move all the French-language books first to Tunis and then to France, where we had to pay an arm and a leg, but at least they got printed, published, and disseminated.

I went to Bogota because we had a problem with our Spanish-language titles. Our books published in Argentina were being rejected by the Mexicans who claimed Argentines don't

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write Spanish. Books published in Mexico were rejected in Argentina. So you have to either print in Spain, which everybody accepts, or in Bogota, because Colombian Spanish is reputed to be the best in Latin America. Bogota would have been less expensive, but I found Colombian publishers were not geared up to produce the volume we needed.

Q: Before we leave that, the 1970s were a time of considerable left-right ideological conflict in the U.S., particularly in academia. There must have been some conflicting standards of political correctness in what books you selected. You probably had public member commissions in USIA looking over your shoulder. How was that process?

GRAVES: It was sticky at best. Hanky-panky and edicts from on high. I had no quarrel so long as we took on honest-to-God titles that had been published by legitimate American publishers. What I objected to and what got me into trouble with Congress were phony books subsidized by some dubious outfit and then used in our overseas programs without ever having been published by a legitimate publisher. This I considered to be bad propaganda which detracted from our legitimate titles. But our right-wing colleagues claimed academe was biased and conservative views seldom got published so our list of titles should include books from other sources.

Q: *Were the public members that you had to work with an asset or aobstacle or both?*

GRAVES: Both. What was then being published in the United States represented the middle and the left much better than the right. The people on the right felt that they were being left out (pun intended!), which from a statistical standpoint was certainly true.

Q: *Also before we leave that job, what was the reentry into the States and the Washington culture like both for the family and professionally? There are Foreign Service officers who consider themselves either Washington operators or field officers? Which were you?*

GRAVES: I didn't know Washington. I was eager to see what it was like, gain insight into how the bureaucracies worked. But we of course had to suffer what we all refer to as

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“instant poverty.” Part of our remuneration overseas comes as fringe benefits—housing, utilities. These are all cut off when you arrive in Washington. That was a bit of a shock. We had other problems in that our children were francophone. They had all gone beyond the point of no return. The youngest was 14 and knew nothing about the U.S. because we had so many children that during home leave we couldn't afford to stay anywhere but with their grandparents in Canada.

Q: But overall, you feel for your children, the Foreign Service experience was a positive?

GRAVES: I think so. Looking at what happened to the children of many of my colleagues, I think that what we did was right. Early on we figured out that I was likely to spend my career in French-speaking countries. We wanted to keep our children with us. We didn't want to send them off to boarding schools. The solution was to put them in local French schools very young. The younger ones started in at the pre-kindergarten stage and they heard French from me at home. So there was no language problem. They simply went clear through the French school system, staying always with us at home and being comfortable in a place like Yaoundé. Instead of having a small American community, “Little America,” to live in, they had the whole town. They could talk to everybody and move around freely. They knew their whole age group, so much so that one of our daughters married a Cameroonian. We have a granddaughter that is half African. I think that our children are all psychologically well. Perhaps their English is less than perfect. You know the most Anglophone of our children, the eldest, and he is happy here in Paris. He spent more time in the States than the others, but he has a French baccalaureate and his French is native. So we kept them with us, whereas some of my colleagues who sent their children off to boarding schools had dreadful drug related problems. Two disappeared in the fracas of the sixties. We enjoyed having our six children with us all through their childhood.

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Q: Moving through your Washington tour, after the year in Publications, you became a senior USIA inspector, visited 26 countries that we can't all cover here. How was that and how did the Inspection Service then work?

GRAVES: I think the Inspection Service was under fire then and eventually what I was in favor of lost out. You were probably aware of the controversy. The bean counters against the people who insisted that we look hard at the goals of each operation and try to judge how well they were being realized. The bean counters were primarily interested in what they called "waste and fraud." In my view, gradually the bean counters won, the substantive people lost out.

Q: So, the issue was a kind of "gotcha," catch people in violation rather than go in as consultants and improve an operation?

GRAVES: Right. Observe and consult with a view to improving operations. If an operation or program looked bad, not because it was misusing paper clips, but because it was not achieving its goals, we tried to pinpoint the problems and suggest ways of improving performance. We gave high marks to officers who were contributing to the achievement of the post's goals. Others were low rated or even removed. Our inspections were often done in conjunction with Department inspections. We cooperated with each other. Some inspections resulted in major overhauls because the post was not focused on its stated goals or certain officers were clearly not doing their job.

Q: So, you caused tours to be curtailed.

GRAVES: And officers selected out. At that time, we still wrote reports on each officer. It was a big job. Even occasionally, an ambassador went by the boards. But we were always conscious that we could be wrong and very careful when our report could damage a career.

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Q: Were there any particular highlights of that tour, surprises to you, or conclusions you drew looking at 26 countries and how U.S. missions or USIA and State abroad were working?

GRAVES: I learned a great deal from observing both the excellent officers and the poor ones. The whole thing boils down to individuals. The rules and guidelines are not of much importance compared to the individual officers, their strengths and their shortcomings. I think that a good inspection should fasten on the individuals and the post's goals. You can take exception sometimes to the stated goals and priorities of a given office, bureau, or entity. Washington and its priorities. I personally felt in those years, for example, that the Consular Service was given short shrift. It didn't have the support, the money, and the personnel to do a good job. We sometimes argued among ourselves about whether or not various offices were allotting assets in terms of our real interests and tried to frame our report in favor of changing priorities.

Q: *But in a formal sense, you were looking strictly at the USIS?*

GRAVES: Sometimes the two were interconnected. But I never wrote report on a State officer.

Q: Looking across all geographic regions for maybe the first time, did you reach any conclusions on the difference in the USIA mission and approach in different parts of the world? Were some regions more taxing than others?

GRAVES: I thought that much of what USIS was doing in Europe and especially in Germany was rather useless. European media, libraries and cultural activities were omnipresent and sophisticated. Europe didn't need USIS. I remember trying to close some branch posts. For example, Kiel. Earlier inspections had tried to close branch posts in Germany and gotten nowhere because they were all financed by the Germans who wanted to maintain the American presence as a buffer against the East and the Soviet

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Union. When we went north to close Kiel, we learned that only a week earlier Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had participated in a post program. It was his home area and he was a great supporter of USIS Kiel. USIS Bonn had never managed to entice the Chancellor to participate in any of its programs. So we tippy toed out of town after drafting a glowing report on USIS Kiel.

Q: When you got back, when you wrote your reports, were the recommendations taken pretty seriously? Did the Director take notice? Did he pick and choose what he liked and didn't like?

GRAVES: All our recommendations were not implemented. But the posts had to respond to each and every one. There was dialogue. Sometimes, what we proposed proved impractical. Nevertheless, I would say that in those days inspections were taken seriously by the decision makers, but the accounting part was growing and becoming more important. The General Accounting Office kept insisting on this. It finally became an obsession in U.S. media and in the Congress. War on fraud and waste.

Q: After a lot of travel in those two years, in 1976, you moved on to be chief of the USIA Operations Center. That is a counterpart to the State Operations Center.

GRAVES: Right. There is also one in the Pentagon and another in the White House. We were moved around so I did short orientation stints in all of them. Nearly all communications from overseas go into the Operations Centers from which they are distributed to the appropriate offices. A few are included in a daily summary for top decision makers. But most cables coming into Washington were never seen by the Secretary of State or the President or even the Director of USIA. The operations centers sent them only the cables bearing very special tags along with summaries of a very few additional messages which seemed likely to interest them. Whether they read them or not is another question. I laughed at myself because I thought for years that putting big tags on messages would get them a reading by the big bosses . It's a little man in the

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Operations Center who mostly decides who sees what. People who have access to the President or the Secretary or the Director or the Chief of Staff may of course bring certain messages to their attention, but urgency, classification and distribution tags do not assure that a message will cause a big splash. Much more important is what is big in Washington at the moment or what is particularly worrying the big bosses today.

Q: Didn't it also have a crisis response role?

GRAVES: Yes, 24 hours a day. This reminds me of a funny incident. There was a fire and we were supposed to evacuate the building. Suddenly we realized there was no way to lock the place up. There were no locks on the outside. You can't get into an Operations Center except if someone unlocks the door from the inside. You've got to be personally identified, no matter what kind of ID card you have. The whole place is full of alarms, so you can't even walk around unless you know how to move. But there was never any thought given to what we would do if we had to evacuate the place. Finally, I decided, until they come and get me, I'd better just stay right here in the smoke. But I sent all the employees out.

Q: What kind of crisis in USIA would come up that you would have to deal with in the Operations Center?

GRAVES: We received all the cables, including State and military messages, but we only had to take action on USIS cable. The crises could involve someone going berserk like Erdos or a terrible accident, or a foreign government's action. Then there were the protection cases. Often times despicable Americans, and the post urgently needed to know what to do with them. You suspect the guy is lying and has a record an arm long back in the States but you get no response from the Department because the guy could have powerful friends. There is of course a ploy to pry a response out of State: "If the Department doesn't see any problem, this is what we're going to do...." For the record, this protects the post since the Department could have instructed the post to do otherwise.

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Q: So, you finished your Washington tour in 1979. Before we leave Washington, you had three successive senior assignments in USIA. It was your first stretch in Washington. What did you conclude watching the various USIA directors at that time about the overall operation, the interface with the White House, coming back from the field, the role of USIA in the U.S. government as a whole?

GRAVES: I don't think USIA had much importance in Washington. Besides, it was clearly illegal for USIA to operate in the U.S. In my case, since I attended briefings at the White House and had occasion to talk with the Director of USIA, it was an edifying experience and should have occurred earlier. An officer should have a better idea than I did of how Washington works. When I was overseas all those years, I really didn't understand the considerations that determine policy. I didn't know how to manipulate the bureaucracy. I learned a lot about how decisions get made.

Q: But was it your observation that different directors had different roles with presidents and that that affected the overall role of the Agency?

GRAVES: Yes. There was a big difference when our Director was a personal friend of the President and had easy access. Sometimes it turned out that USIA had better access than the Department. When Reagan was in the White House, for example, USIA had immediate access to the White House.

Q: *That was with Charles Wick?*

GRAVES: Right. While Secretary Rogers had little access.

Q: *Did that translate down to the kinds of offices you were in, you had a feeling of more involvement, power, and influence?*

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GRAVES: And more opportunity to make expensive mistakes implementing dubious programs like Worldnet. Some of Wick's ideas were not all that great. But they had power behind them and were therefore funded.

Q: After those seven years in Washington, you got a major assignment as public affairs officer to the embassy in Tehran. That was a new area for you. How did that come about?

GRAVES: I was assigned to Kinshasa. John Reinhart, who was head of the Agency at that time, was rather annoyed when I told him that I didn't think I would be welcome since I had known Mobutu a long time ago and we hadn't gotten on at all well. Truth to tell, I didn't want to go back to Kinshasa.

Q: Reinhart was himself an Africanist who had been ambassador to Nigeria.

GRAVES: Right. He had also been head of the Africa office in USIS and the African Bureau at State. He probably knew I had got on well with Tshombe but not Mobutu. So I was assigned to Tehran, a very major post. But I didn't go off to Iran with the notion that the Agency was doing me a big favor. Khomeini and the revolutionaries didn't look kindly on America and Americans. The country was in the throes of radical change and internal strife. No dependents were allowed to accompany officers assigned to Iran.

Q: Iran was, of course, going through a wrenching transition of its own, how long were you there as public affairs officer before you were taken hostage?

GRAVES: Four or five months. I arrived in Iran shortly after the Shah left and Khomeini returned triumphantly. Ironical. I had been assigned there in part because many of the top people in government were French-speaking, including of course the Shah.

Q: You mentioned you had had no previous connection with Iran. Through your francophone background, had you had any connections or ties with Khomeini in the Paris years?

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GRAVES: No, none at all. I didn't know anything about Iran. I went through the normal briefings, so I can't say that it was like Vietnam, where it was a direct transfer with no preparation. I had proper briefing preparation, but no language training.

Q: What did the briefings prepare you for and what did you find when you got there?

GRAVES: Essentially, the briefings tried to emphasize the idea that it was in our interests to get on with Khomeini and his regime, even though the revolutionaries were hostile and prickly. This was primarily for business reasons, arms training and building contracts.

Q: Basically, the transition had occurred. All of the debates about Iran's stability were behind you. The mission when you arrived was in the process of picking up the pieces.

GRAVES: The transition was far from over. But the consensus was that Khomeini and the fundamentalists would be in power for quite some time. Therefore, we should be practical and pragmatic and learn to live with them.

Q: At the time of the hostage crisis, we had a chargé. When you arrived, was there an ambassador?

GRAVES: No, he had left.

Q: Who had that been?

GRAVES: William Sullivan, whom I met in the Philippines during our inspection.

Q: And the charge was already Bruce Laingen?

GRAVES: Yes, Bruce Laingen was already in charge when I arrived.

Q: There was clearly a kind of foreboding, an anti-Americanism.

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GRAVES: I wouldn't say there was a strong anti-American current among even the higher placed people in the government. You have to recall that some of them even had American passports. They had lived in the United States a long time. In fact most Iranians were cautiously friendly. Everyday there were long lines of people in front of our consular windows trying to get visas to enter the U.S.

Q: Were those educated elite Iranians friendly to the United States or were they already themselves becoming targets of animosity or not yet?

GRAVES: Yes. After being there awhile, I picked up some Farsi words like "tagoutis," which means "tainted." They were already tagoutis. They stayed in Iran because, if they left, all their property would be confiscated. But they sent their families out of the country. There were lots of Iranians opposed to the revolutionaries. They were especially outraged by the aggressions of young revolution guards who stopped their cars and questioned them. There was much conflict and confusion. The economy was paralyzed. The city was a forest of abandoned cranes. All building projects had stopped. Industrial operations lacked parts and technicians.

Q: *An obvious new religiosity.*

GRAVES: Yes, very much so. You could hear the calls to prayer anthere were many street demonstrations.

Q: *Peaceful ones?*

GRAVES: Peaceful in the sense that no one was any longer being killed. Six months earlier, there had been a great many deaths in the streets. But Khomeini had won out. Still, I had the feeling that the street demonstrations were not spontaneous. They were organized by the mullahs (Iranian clergy). Sunnite Muslims object to the idea that there

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is any clergy in the Muslim tradition, but Iran is Shiite and its mullahs have frequently intervened not only in politics but in nearly every aspect of people's lives.

Q: The mission as you found it must have been hunkered down anparing down from its former large presence. What did it seem like?

GRAVES: Exactly right. The American presence in Iran was horrendous, especially military-related business. What with Khomeini and the uncertainties, the mission was of course busy trying to reduce it or at least make it less evident. Except for India, which I surveyed when I was an inspector, Iran was the largest USIS operation in the world. In Tehran USIS even had a huge printing plant and a building that was some eight stories high just for the teaching of English. Everyone wanted to learn English. USIS also had an elaborate cultural center, with a huge theater. You could have a football match on the stage, which could be rotated so you could change scenery and decor on the back half while the show continued on the half visible to the audience . There was also an impressive library. In addition, USIS had branch posts in the provinces and sundry English-teaching operations. I had a huge operation to cope with.

Q: But with such a large bureaucracy and all its components (the military, the military advisors, the CIA), many of them with strong vested interests in what had been there before, it must have been a wrenching, cumbersome process to see them groping with this new reality. What were the country team meetings like?

GRAVES: The military were the most perplexed because they were essentially in the business of selling arms and training to the Iranians, which leads me to a major point: The United States bought a great deal of oil from Iran and felt the need to somehow recoup. Therefore, we sold Iran arms. The Shah was foolish to buy all those arms, which even with the expensive training programs were never of any real use. Megalomania! A misuse of billions which the revolution harped on. Perhaps more important and less known in the United States, we also worked hard at selling Iran agricultural products, which distorted

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their domestic markets. For example, an Iranian farmer can't produce poultry at the price that we produce rubber chickens in our factories. So Iranian resentment was strong and could be used readily to whip up crowds against the United States. I didn't have much sympathy for the Shah's repressive regime but he had a point when he claimed he would rule like a Swedish monarch if Iranians acted like Swedes. I've already mentioned that, in my opinion, the US didn't have to support unsavory regimes and dictatorships; we could do business with them without giving the impression that they had been installed by us and were supported by the United States. Iran is a flagrant case. Early on the Shah was deposed, and then brought back by the CIA. Mossedegh wanted to nationalize the oil industry and throw out the "rascals" as he called them. There was a book published by one of the CIA operators of the period, Kermit Roosevelt bragging about how Mossedegh had been countered. I find it interesting that this book completely disappeared shortly after publication. You not only couldn't buy it anyplace, you couldn't find it in any library, which shows the size of the CIA operation which made Kermit Roosevelt's book disappear. In the book, he tells how the CIA reinstalled the Shah. Consider all the arms and the waste of money, the damage to their agriculture and their cultural sensitivities, and finally the fact that we put the Shah back on his peacock throne. There is little doubt that the Iranians had some very serious grievances, which went unreported in our media during the hostage crisis. But some of my colleagues were aware of the grievances. Several spoke Farsi so well they could disappear in a crowd. We had good contacts and officers who knew the country well, so we were not without means to understand the Iranians.

Q: I understand you to be saying that you feel that the billions of dollars in arms sales in the Nixon-Kissinger period to Iran was essentially destabilizing and were not in Iranian or U.S. interests.

GRAVES: Certainly not in our long-term interests nor Iran's. I'm not sure all that money could have been used in a better way. Much experience in Africa taught me that it is not easy to help or be useful. Even for an enlightened ruler it's not easy to promote

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development. I am not convinced that all that oil money could have been effectively used to improve the life, health and economy of Iran if it hadn't been wasted on arms.

Q: Coming back to the dialogue around the country team table, I would assume with your background and being the USIA representative with a mandate for outreach and getting the opinion of all sectors, you would have found yourself in conflict with other agencies locked into particular elites and perhaps with a vested interest. Or was that at that stage all behind?

GRAVES: I think it was pretty well behind. I didn't have bad feelings about any of my country-team colleagues. At country team meeting I didn't hear hard-line jingo views. Even the general responsible for our military programs seemed to understand the situation and recognize that what we had done in the past wasn't always in the interests of the Iranians and they had some legitimate grievances. His chief concern was to keep a low profile and reduce in an orderly fashion his training and equipment replacement programs. He seemed genuinely concerned to avoid ruffling revolution feathers or compromise his contacts. I would say that he was good at it.

Q: There you were, as it developed, just a few months before you were taken hostage. How did you without a background and without the language go about putting the pieces together? How did you as the public affairs officer go about the job of outreach and U.S. image in this very sensitive situation?

GRAVES: One of the decisions I made right away was to assume that the Iranians still wanted to learn English. So we continued to have hundreds of students in class every day. We also continued our theater and arts programs in our beautiful cultural center, and Iranians in large numbers continued to work in our art classes, visit our exhibits and use our library. Not just in Tehran, but in all the other cities where we had USIS programs. In addition, because part of my job was to gather information, to know what people were saying and thinking, what worried them, I worked at acquiring contacts. I also had good

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sources in that I had officers who spoke Farsi well and knew the country. I was personally in contact with top officials because they were French-speaking. I visited them in their offices and attended dinners and receptions. I found the Iranians essentially sympa [French: nice] and interesting. They love flowers and the arts. I learned one thing from an elaborate reception which I have never forgotten. There was this sumptuous table. The Prime Minister caught me admiring it and remarked, "One eats with his eyes as well as with his mouth and stomach." I've never forgotten that.

Q: As somebody not knowing Iran, I'm a little surprised that just months before the hostage crisis, there were still crowds wanting to learn English, who didn't perceive that as perhaps something dangerous for them. So, it was then somewhat of an open environment. Were you able to travel to the branch posts around the country?

GRAVES: Yes. I traveled freely, no problem at all. The branch posts were running reasonably well. In some cases, they were what we call bi-national centers, which means that they had an Iranian-American board (essentially Iranian). People really wanted to learn English. In the provinces, we didn't have great cultural programs because it was hard to transport big groups and their paraphernalia. We were also a bit leery of what could happen if we advertised and put on a big show. Khomeini was all powerful, but the crowds that later would be chanting "Death to America and Americans" were not hostile.

Q: As you met with the senior officials, many of them French-speaking, did one have a feeling that they had power and authority or was there really a separate mullah government behind the scenes and this was by then a front?

GRAVES: Everything was in transition, but it was already clear that nobody dared do anything that was really opposed by Khomeini. But officials didn't seem to be frightened straw men. They often convoked us and treated us to emotional lectures on our sins and the merits of the revolution. Others, in private, expressed misgivings about the excesses of self-appointed revolutionary guards.

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Q: I assume nobody saw or knew Khomeini, but did the embassy have other channels into the mullahs?

GRAVES: There were several who were more open. One of the most open was Ayatollah Montazeri. But I never saw any report that reflected much direct contact with Khomeini, the mullahs, or militant students.

Q: The students who would turn up at your English language centers were relatively apolitical and didn't reflect this radical strain?

GRAVES: I don't think most of them were even at university. They had other occupations and concerns, many had jobs. They simply felt that English was a very useful tool that they wanted to acquire. Also, you have to remember that the embassy compound was besieged by literally thousands of Iranians who wanted to get visas to go to the United States. Our consular operation was the biggest I have ever seen and I inspected a lot of countries. It was just incredible the number of Iranians who wanted to go to the United States.

Q: Washington in these months must have been extremely focused on getting regular assessments and making sense of where Iran was going. Were you aware of tremendous interest? Was that reflected in visits and demands on you?

GRAVES: Yes. But we didn't have the kind of problem that became so burdensome in Vietnam of all kinds of unlikely visitors, such as politicians, press, and religious groups. The visitors were mostly our own officers.

Q: The very public missions like that of General Heismann, who for example, had been before?

GRAVES: He was there at one point, but low profile. I would say that perhaps we had more military visitors than State Department or CIA. It wasn't a circus like Vietnam.

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Q: As you came close to the takeover of the embassy, there had been some earlier warnings or attempts. Was that in these months?

GRAVES: By late August/September there were big demonstrations. At first, we were very concerned. But we got used to them. For reasons unknown to us, the demonstrations would peter out or go elsewhere. Crowds chanted slogans and sprayed paint but they didn't climb over the embassy compound wall.

Q: So, these were mass regime-sponsored...

GRAVES: They were certainly orchestrated by the mullahs. I didn't know what had been going on until I was a hostage and had occasion to talk with the students who had taken over the embassy. Many of the student leaders, especially the medical students, had spent years in the United States. They knew America and the Americans and spoke English very well.

Q: These were students who you met for the first time as a hostage?

GRAVES: Right. As they explained, they felt the great revolution, which they favored, was simply petering out. What to do? They cited the program Mao had invented, the Cultural Revolution to re-animate, galvanize, and put back on track the revolution. They had already tried various ploys. During the summer, they had gone out to the villages and worked with the villagers, who were happy to have help, but didn't care much about revolution or change. Next they had tried organizing squatter movements to bring the poor out of south Tehran and install them in the northern suburbs where the rich had lived and where many houses had been abandoned after their owners had fled the country. This didn't work out very well because the poor felt isolated and uncomfortable in their new digs and gradually wandered back down to south Tehran's lively slums. Finally the students latched onto the idea of taking over the American embassy, but their intention was to sit in for only a day or two. Whip up nationwide enthusiasm for the

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revolution by demanding that the U.S. return the shah to Iran for trial. But they didn't have prior permission, authorization, or the blessings of Khomeini and the mullahs. They were afraid Khomeini would say no and they were also afraid that one of the growing demonstrations would get out of hand and spoil their slowly developing plans. So they were busy leading these demonstrations off to other squares and letting them peter out. We couldn't understand why the demonstrators would get all worked up and then march off.

The student leaders I got to know after they finally took over the embassy were an able and sophisticated lot. They were pleased indeed when, the first night, they received the blessings of Khomeini and a visit from his son, but they had no plans to stay on beyond a couple of days. Unfortunately, the Iranian public and many of the less sophisticated students took the slogan for the return of the shah as a serious demand, which played into the hands of the mullahs who needed a rallying cry to shore up their shaky revolution. The occupation dragged on. By the third week, many of the most sophisticated leaders returned to their work in the hospitals and we were left in the hands of students who had no experience abroad and didn't understand much about the world. It was a very different group from the leaders who planned the takeover. Owing to obsessive anti-Communism, American media and public opinion never accepted the fact that we were taken hostage by genuine students. They weren't Communists and the takeover wasn't a Russian plot. On the contrary, the students were anti-Communist and opposed to Russia.

Q: Go back a little to the actual takeover: where you were, how the realization came to you, what really was happening.

GRAVES: Another demonstration, yawn. But around noon, we were startled to see demonstrators come through the open compound gate. At first, mostly young women in chadors. Our so-called guards had obviously been subverted by the students. They didn't have to break in. We were herded into our library to hear a lecture on the misdeeds of America. I thought the whole drill was a farce. I didn't take it seriously. I assumed I would

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be home to have a proper dinner that night. However, I began to worry when through the library windows, I saw colleagues being led out of the chancery (I was in another building) blindfolded and with their hands bound. I realized that the chancery was also in the hands of the students. I later learned from one of the sophisticated student leaders that they knew our preoccupation with fires obliged us to always have an access free, which they spotted during the weeks they tramped around the compound as legitimate visitors, grad students from American universities. So they slipped into the chancery without violent confrontation with our Marine guards who, in any case, had orders not to fire on the intruders.

Months later, I was to hear from a fellow hostage, a communicator, the story of his capture. He was ordered to climb to the roof through a trap door in the ceiling and hide all the arms that were in our safes. While he was up there, the last bastion fell, the strong or code room below. When he clamored back down from the roof, he found himself among Iranian students who paid no attention to him because he was part American Indian and therefore easily mistaken for an Iranian. He mingled with the students milling around in the code room, but finally decided he'd better identify himself since he didn't speak a word of Farsi and didn't know a thing about the country. Too dangerous to go out onto the streets. Better to be with the Americans.

Q: Did you as your building was being taken over (I understand it was on the compound but separate) have a chance to caucus with your staff and make a plan?

GRAVES: We were all put together in the library, Americans with our Iranian employees, FSNs. Most of the Iranian employees were not Muslims. They tended to be Armenian Christians and they were frightened, maybe more frightened than we Americans were.

Q: *Were there any Bahais?*

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GRAVES: Not to my knowledge. But persecution of the Bahais was concern of the embassy.

Q: How were those Christian Iranian FSNs then handled?

GRAVES: It was hard to know for sure what really happened to them, but I think all of them were eventually released and none was seriously harmed.

Q: Without the many months of detention?

GRAVES: I think they were all sent home the same day. It was very hard to piece this out. We didn't have a chance to check on it afterwards.

Q: I'm getting the picture of this happening quickly, you and your staff in a separate building in the library, the chancery being taken, little chance for concerting. I know the charg# was out at the Ministry. There was no central direction going on. There wasn't time.

GRAVES: No opportunity for concerting. We hostages weren't allowed to talk to each other. There had been a big demonstration the day before and the charg# was very annoyed by all the slogans sprayed on the compound wall at the place in front of our consular operation. "Yankee go home!" So, before going off to the Ministry to protest, the charg# decided to close down the consular operation in protest against the desecration. Shades were pulled over the consular windows. One of the Marines who was a good cartoonist drew a shade with a sign, "Yankee went home."

Q: In saying that initially you didn't take it seriously, I guess you're also saying that there was a calmness among your initial captors and nobody felt that the place was going to be burnt down with you in it or that it had the possibilities of terrible violence. These people knew what they were doing.

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GRAVES: They were reasonably well organized for the short term. Sometimes it seemed like bad theater. They would make great threats. But most of the Americans didn't take the threats seriously. There was also a certain amount of outrage among us over being subjected to all the nonsense.

Q: In the months leading up to it that you were in Iran, I assume there were no families?

GRAVES: In general, no, but my wife had just completed consular training and was about to enplane for Tehran. Several days after the embassy had been taken over and we were all hostages she got a phone call from the Travel Section of the Department saying that she had to come down and pick up her tickets immediately. They weren't going to stay open just for her. The employees were so little aware of what was going on in the world that they didn't know that Tehran was no longer a place approved by the Department.

Q: How did things seem to proceed from there? I know there have been many full hostage accounts. You yourself may have written somewhat on it. Starting from that point, how did the 14 months develop? There were some groups who initially got out, perhaps with the help of other embassies.

GRAVES: During the actual takeover, some American officers were working outside the compound, including my people at the Cultural Center. They were eventually gathered up and became part of the hostage group in the compound. But another group managed to make its way to the Canadian chancery and was finally spirited out of Iran by the Canadians. That was certainly a very courageous and complicated operation to pull off. It was not easy to hide that many people and finally pass them off as Canadians at the airport. Hats off to the Canadians! As you know, we have arrangements with the British and with the Canadians to come to each other's aid in times of crisis. But the British turned away the stranded group which the Canadians eventually took in.

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Q: You were initially in the library. You mentioned others being led out of the chancery. Was your group then moved and subsequently separated?

GRAVES: We were separated into small groups. Most of the time we were blindfolded and our hands were bound. What I can say is limited because all I know was what I could hear. But I knew the compound well and therefore knew where I was being led. I ended up in one of the small bungalows that housed TDY and arriving officers before they got their official housing. The students didn't yet know who was what. I was with several Marines, a Japanese businessman and another man who supposedly had been simply visiting the embassy to get American textbooks to teach English. Once we were inside, they took off our blindfolds but our hands were still bound. Our student captors didn't seem at all threatening. Most of them were women. My main worry at this point was the chanting crowd outside the compound, which sounded threatening. "Death to America and Americans!" I wasn't afraid of the students, but I was afraid the chanting masses would break in and tear us limb from limb. Their roar shook the walls all night.

Q: Did you feel they tended to know what USIA was and perhaps concentrate more on people that were in the chancery? Did your ending up with these visitors to the embassy reflect that or not?

GRAVES: Exactly the opposite. The Iranians obviously tried to figure out who did what and who was who. They got hold of the protocol list. I was number two on that list and the top man was at the Ministry. As the highest ranking officer in their hands, I was isolated and lost track of time. I was questioned and threatened and then questioned again and again, not allowed to sleep, forced to always remain standing. They seemed to know that CIA types could be tucked away in almost any office and especially wanted to identify deep-cover people by latching onto their handlers.

Q: *This separation occurred after a matter of weeks?*

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GRAVES: The third week. It took them a while to sort us out. At first they asked each of us what we did. I said I taught English. In the middle of the night, they shook me up. Men with machine guns and masks. "You no teacher. You big boss!" I was trucked out of the embassy compound and moved some 30 times during the year, always at night. The students obviously had enemies. At one point I was held in a desert village hundreds of miles from Tehran and the building came under attack. Bullets flying all around me. I didn't know if I should be rooting for the students or the attackers who might well be much worse.

Q: Before we come to that, how was it to see the experience initially through the bewildered eyes of these random visitors to the embassy?

GRAVES: They were very different. The huge man who was supposedly in the business of teaching English but was probably connected with the CIA was demanding and outraged. The Japanese was very polite. There weren't enough mattresses but he didn't have any problem sleeping on the floor, whereas the rest of us did. I smoke a pipe sometimes. He had some tobacco which he shared with me. I finally demurred, saying, "At this rate you'll soon run out of tobacco." He answered, "We smoke together and we stop smoking together." He was a good companion. After the second week, he disappeared. The huge man was not treated well. I think they figured he wasn't what he claimed he was. The Japanese apparently really was a businessman and was released as far as I know.

Q: You were moved 30 times. As the second ranking on the protocol list, you were questioned intensively by different types of Iranians trying to pry out all kinds of information.

GRAVES: They had a PLO manual on how to take hostages and how to deal with them. They were reading it and trying to do what it said. But their knowledge of Arabic was not great. The whole process is supposed to keep the prisoner under such pressure that he finally loses track of everything and doesn't know what he's saying. But the students didn't understand the importance of unrelenting pressure. There was a little man (We called

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him “the Dwarf” later on.) who was sympathetic. He kept saying, “You be alright,” which helped me tremendously. I had experience with interrogations in Vietnam. I had visited the tiger cages and talked with interrogators. I was aware that the students didn't know how to interrogate, and also knew that the best way to baffle interrogations is to agree to anything and everything, which means that eventually they can't figure out what is really true. So I systematically agreed to everything and added to their worst accusations. I kept piling it on, didn't deny a thing. I had learned in Vietnam that the really hard nuts to crack were the people who had been trained to agree to anything and everything. Name names? So I named names, but concocted a huge list which didn't give them any useful info. There were too many names, too many fictitious names and every time I had to repeat, the list changed because I of course could not begin to remember what I had said previously.

Q: Did that get you into any later conflict with hostages who hataken a name and serial number only approach?

GRAVES: No, because when I found myself in a luxurious room with them at the end of our sojourn, I was gaunt, taciturn and hard. Used to sleeping on cold floors and going barefoot. While several in the room had spent the whole 14 months in the relative luxury of the embassy compound. They were demanding and outraged by our student guards. Their bravado seemed soft and silly. Only a very few hostages had been severely interrogated and done hard time in solitary confinement in cold prison cells. It was obvious that we had come through something our more fortunate colleagues didn't want to hear about. A colonel and I soon discovered we had at one point occupied adjacent cells. We were grateful for the respite but did not expect it to last for long. Neither the colonel nor I expected to survive Iran. We went to sleep each night expecting the hard-handed crew would come for us as they had so often in the past. But we were glad to be together, to talk with someone who knew what prison cells and solitary confinement were like.

Q: Were you mistreated?

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GRAVES: I had some bad moments. The worst occurred when I was handcuffed to a seat in a van which plunged into a ravine and flipped over nose to tail several times. The driver was probably killed. I was knocked unconscious by the second flip. When the students from another car finally pulled me out it was almost dawn. I was covered with bruises and paralyzed by a back injury which still bothers me today.

I was surprised to learn after release that the media had been reporting that we were tortured. Our student captors were young and incompetent, but they worried about our well-being since Khomeini had specifically charged them with responsibility for our health. In my view, my interrogation did not include torture. I of course had bad moments and took refuge in fantasy. But I don't recall any case where I was willfully mistreated by the students. They sometimes talked about the bad guys among us being put on trial. I remember feeling terribly threatened when I was moved in with one of the communicators who was suspected of being CIA, and with a political officer who spoke excellent Farsi. He had lived for years in Iran before joining the Foreign Service and was married to an Iranian. We weren't allowed to talk to each other but when we heard the crowds going by, I watched his face thinking, "He can understand what they're saying and if he's worried, I'm worried." He didn't seem to be worried, so that helped.

Q: You were unable to speak.

GRAVES: We were not allowed to speak.

Q: People were monitoring that.

GRAVES: A guard was always with ult wasn't yet necessary for me to learn to sleep on a really hard, marble floor. At this point, we were in a tagouti house and I had a bed. In fact we had to stay always on our beds since there was no space to do otherwise. But my bed broke down. The guard assumed I had done something to get the slat that fell out to use as a club. He was all excited about that club. He knew nothing about Western beds and

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couldn't imagine what that club was doing there. Of course, they didn't do anything about repairing the bed so the rest of the time I was there, I lived on an inclined plane.

Later, I was moved out into the desert. We were moved frequently, probably because the students feared an attack. In any case there were armed groups opposed to them and we did come under fire. I can remember lying on the floor while bullets pierced the wall over my head.

Q: Other groups of Iranians were shooting where you had been moved?

GRAVES: Right. The students came under armed attack.

Q: By whom?

GRAVES: No way to know. But it seems clear the mullahs were a long time consolidating their revolution and we hostages were useful in whipping up public support for them. As far as I know this struggle was never reported in the media, which insisted we were being held to force the US. to return the shah to Iran for trial.

As I mentioned earlier, while being moved blindfolded and handcuffed to a van seat in the middle of the night, the driver must have fallen asleep and plunged us into a ravine. My back was so badly injured that I couldn't move. The students had a terrible time getting me out. I didn't think I would survive the move. Miracle! I had no medical care but gradually recovered nonetheless.

Q: For the duration, you must have been in considerable pain.

GRAVES: I learned not to make moves that hurt.

Q: No medication or care at all.

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GRAVES: No. But it wasn't because the students didn't care. They just didn't have means at that point to get me to a doctor. Just as when we were hungry and thirsty. I had the impression they were sharing what they had, not 100%, but they were hungry and thirsty, too. The moves in the middle of the night were sometimes long, as much as 12 hours on the road. One of the things we all feared was the pain of not being able to urinate. There is a point where that's all you think about. You worry about your bladder and nothing else.

Q: You were totally cut off from outside news, knowledge of the failed rescue attempt, reaction of the U.S. government?

GRAVES: Nothing at the time. Much later, we were told about the great victory of the Iranians. I think we were back in the chancery again when the rescue attempt took place, but we had no sure way of keeping track of time and dates so I can't be sure. In any case, it was spring and there were signs that we might soon be released. The students even had themselves photographed with us. They were making a big effort to feed us well and even take us over to the showers. We had gone, especially those of us who had been in the desert, weeks without washing, without shoes, sleeping on the floor. Here we had mattresses and showers. The students had been helping themselves to the embassy commissary's stores, including food to feed the Americans who wouldn't eat Iranian food. One Marine almost died out in the desert because he absolutely wouldn't eat anything but junk food from the commissary. I kept trying to get him to eat the Iranian yogurt. But he wouldn't touch it because it was live yogurt, which was exactly what he needed for his intestinal problem. But getting back to the shower room and a good laugh, we found that one of the commissary products the students had been using was rug shampoo. Imagine what it must have done to their heads! They could read "shampoo," but they didn't know about rugs.

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Q: After months of being moved around and interrogation, there came a point when it sounds as if they virtually gave up on you and you were in a holding pattern pending release or something else.

GRAVES: Not exactly. The attitude of the students had changed. They were downright friendly and full of good cheer. Relaxed. We could even hear them playing soccer outside our chancery window. Then, suddenly, they were furious. Most of us were moved out of the chancery, out of Tehran. My guess is that the rescue attempt scared and infuriated them. They thought they had a deal cooking with Carter, that they had won and their onerous chores were coming to an end. Now they understood Carter's talk was just a smoke screen to lull them into reducing security measures. Instead of a deal, he sent them commandos. But for the sand storm and the rescuers incompetence there could have been a shoot-out. My guess is that most of us would have been killed.

Q: This occurred maybe 2/3's through the period that you werhostage?

GRAVES: It was in the spring.

Q: Without outside news, what were your feelings about Washington or the U.S. government? Did you say to yourself that they were doing everything possible or did you feel abandoned?

GRAVES: Both. One hostage even tried to commit suicide. There is no simple answer to that question. At times there was great impatience because we had little idea of what was going on. There were visits, but our visitors were carefully selected by the students and had to agree to restrictions on what they said. At Christmas, for example, there was a Protestant pastor. Many of the hostages were delighted to participate in a religious service. My main interest was a big table piled high with goodies. I hadn't seen fresh fruit in months. What I was really interested in was how much I could stuff into my pocket. When

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my pockets couldn't hold any more fruit I fitted in some nuts. Stupid, since I didn't have any way to crack them.

Q: Was there a feeling that the event was being used by the Iranians?

GRAVES: Yes. The students set up television cameras. No doubt the media showed the world how well we were being looked after. I had learned early on from the medical students that Khomeini said, "Yes" to their operation, but stipulated they had to protect our health. This greatly handicapped the students because to maintain authority over people who are losing hope is not easy and they did not have the option of using much force.

Q: But were not some threatened and mistreated?

GRAVES: We were of course frequently threatened with minor privations, but I don't know personally of any really serious mistreatment. The top military officers, the CIA station chief and others who were identified as CIA, and I were threatened with trial and death penalties, but the other hostages mostly brought privations on themselves, no doubt because they had a psychological need to be defiant.

Q: Admiral Stockton and others have written and talked about the mental games in Vietnam that longer held hostages played to keep their minds alive.

GRAVES: I suppose each one had his own way of coping. I did a lot of fantasizing, day dreaming. Then there was the Stockholm syndrome, prisoners who identified with their captors. I have no quarrel with the way my colleagues coped, except perhaps for the defiant ones who occasionally brought privation down on a whole group.

Q: Had you reading materials to occupy yourselves?

GRAVES: Yes. One of the things the students realized early on was that to avoid confrontations they had to keep us occupied. So they made a great effort to give us books from the embassy compound library. They ran a big book-lending operation until they

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discovered some hostages were slipping messages into their books. I never figured out why a hostage would go to great trouble to put messages in books, or why this worried our student guards. Perhaps the messages were just another act of defiance. As for the students, they had an exaggerated notion of our capabilities. For example, they confiscated our watches so we couldn't communicate with the outside # la Dick Tracy.

Q: The very books you had selected in your Washington job.

GRAVES: Yes, some of them were books from USIS. Others were donations to the library. Over the years people finished a book and dumped it in the library's box. An eclectic collection of paperbacks. I read a lot of books. At one point, they even hauled in for me the whole Great Books Shelf. I'm one of the few people in the world who has really read all of Freud. I came to see him as a complete fraud, but that's another story.

Q: But not the ability some of the Vietnam hostages may have had to discuss among themselves?

GRAVES: No, we couldn't talk to each other.

Q: As this terrible experience is coming to an end, are there another things?

GRAVES: At the end, we were pretty hopeless because we were finally crammed into one of the shah's worst prisons. That was their solution after moving us around and finding that it was too dangerous. They brought us into Tehran and put us in this notorious prison, which they claimed wasn't a prison anymore because it had been decommissioned.

Q: Then there came a day when it seemed that you were moving toward release? You were getting better food, better treatment?

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GRAVES: In that prison, as in earlier places, one of our great problems in the winter was the terrible cold. No way to warm up. In the toilet room, for example, the water ran all over the place and was frozen solid in the morning. We spent our time wheezing and coughing.

Q: A large number of you were by then assembled there?

GRAVES: I couldn't tell, but I had the impression that many were there. Then suddenly, we were being moved to what appeared to be a sort of hotel in the north of Tehran, a relatively pleasant place. The food was much better and we were allowed to talk to each other. It looked as if something was happening. I was in a room with a top military officer. We compared notes. Our itineraries hadn't been all that different, although I had never seen him during our 14 month sojourn. Near the end, when they began to move people out, they left the colonel and me behind. We assumed we were going to be shot.

Much earlier, when we were in the chancery, we had been put against a corridor wall, blindfolded and handcuffed. They pumped shells into their chambers and let us agonize awhile before leading us back to our room which was in shambles. No doubt they were trying to scare us and thus maintain order.

Q: What made them think you were getting out of order?

GRAVES: I don't know. I was particularly shaken because I was asleep. Suddenly rough-handed masked men dragged me into the corridor. The two people who were in the same room with me were awake and saw that it only was bad theater.

One of the hard things for me were the handcuffs. Early on the students found some handcuffs in a safe. They put them on a few of us. So I learned to do everything two-handed. Whenever the handcuffs were removed, I had to laugh at myself. I still moved my hands in unison. The first night I was handcuffed I had a terrible fright because they can lock down if a button is pressed while there is pressure on the manacle. While I was asleep, I must have put pressure on the button and the manacle. I waked with one hand

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numb. I yelled at the student guard but he didn't pay much attention. When he finally understood the problem, he had to go in search of the student who had the key. Sleeping with handcuffs is difficult. But you get used to going without shoes. The pads on the bottom of your feet become leather and the blood circulation adapts to exposure, similar to your hands. After a couple of months, being barefooted didn't bother me. What bothered after release was wearing shoes. Too hot and confining, like wearing gloves indoors.

Q: We left you with the senior military advisor in the hotel.

GRAVES: Happily our turn to join the party came at last. We were examined by a group of Algerian doctors because the Iranians didn't want to have former hostages making false claims. But it hadn't occurred to the Iranians that I could chat in plain French with Algerians who, for the Iranian Moslems, were admirable Arab revolutionaries. The doctors confirmed we would soon be released and flown to Algeria. My talking with the doctors upset the Iranians who kept saying in their broken English, "You no speak." They didn't want me to tell my fellow hostages what I might learn from the doctors because they feared some hostages would become unruly. (On the plane to Algeria I became friendly with one of the doctors and kept in touch with him for years.)

Q: So, then you were suddenly in a convoy headed for the airport?

GRAVES: First, they had to get shoes on us. They led us into a room where there was a huge pile of shoes. I had trouble finding anything that was bearable on my feet. Next, they confiscated our precious belongings —anything useful we had managed to stash in pillow cases. They promised that all our personal effects would be sent to us, including our watches, but nothing was ever returned. Fortunately, I had already removed the notes I made whenever I had pencil and paper. These I slipped into my under shorts with my other private parts, knowing the students were too chaste to search there. I still have those notes which helped me when I set to writing.

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We were transported to the airport in a packed bus which stopped whenever some hostages became too unruly. The need to be defiant. The students were equally unable to act in their own interests. They formed a narrow gauntlet and jeered while we shuffled into the aircraft. I saw people I hadn't seen for 14 months, including our women officers. A joyous reunion.

Q: Of course, Bruce Laingen and the group in the Foreign Ministry.

GRAVES: Right. I saw them for the first time when I got aboard the plane.

Q: So, there was a feeling of euphoria when you lifted off.

GRAVES: Very much so. Bruce, however, didn't know quite what he should say to his people. He realized that, since he hadn't gone through the experience, he wasn't one of us. He sat down with me to discuss what he could say and what he had best not say. To his credit, he was sensitive enough to suspect that some of the ex-hostages might feel the U.S. government and the chargé were partly responsible for their misery. He was of course right. They were delighted to be released, but not happy with what had occurred and not happy with the powers that be. In Germany, when Carter came to visit us, there was great concern that he might receive a very bad reception indeed. As it turned out, he didn't because he didn't try to say anything except that how glad he was we were out. Had he said more, many of the hostages would have chewed him out.

Q: What could you advise Bruce to say and not say?

GRAVES: What I said was simply that he should express how glad he was to see us and not give any advice or instructions. Even more important, he should not presume to speak for the group or even use the term "we." He was grateful and handled himself well. He had a winning manner. He didn't antagonize anybody.

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When we had a press conference, he didn't presume to speak for the group. He also asked me for advice in dealing with the press since I had worked as a journalist and served as a press attach#. I told him what I had always told ambassadors when they asked about dealing with the press. If it's good news, you should participate; if it's bad news, let the press attach# do his job. Also, if you don't like a question, rephrase it and then answer the question as you rephrased it. Do the same with follow-up question. Never answer a question you don't like. The professional journalist soon realizes you're too experienced to be easily trapped into saying what you don't want to say. He may complain that you're not answering his questions, but at least you won't have to try to repair unfortunate quotes in the press.

Q: Were you or he called on to pass on advice on the plane to thPresident on how he should approach this?

GRAVES: No. But when we arrived in Germany, we were swamped with bureaucrats, doctors, and psychiatrists. They all assumed we were fragile and needed counseling. A pain. On the other hand, I was invited to ex-Secretary Vance's room where I spent several hours talking with him. He asked good questions. What I told him may have been passed on to the Department and to Reagan, even though Vance by this time was no longer an official. In any case, I assume he passed what I had to report on to ex-President Carter.

Q: He had resigned after the hostage raid?

GRAVES: Right. So he wasn't seen as one of the bad guys. Personally, I liked him. I liked his humor and his way of asking questions. A relief after having to cope with all the self-styled prisoner experts and do-gooders.

Q: This was before the ceremonies, the debriefings, even the reuniowith families.

GRAVES: Oh, yes. This was in Germany at the military hospital.

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Q: I should have asked before whether as a hostage you received any mail, any communication.

GRAVES: A little, but much less than most of the other hostages.

Q: That is to say, actual mail to you, John Graves, from the family, or just parts of the mass mailings from Americans?

GRAVES: Mass mailings from well-meaning groups who wanted to keep our morale up. This kind of mail from adults was far less helpful than the mail from children who often seemed to know just what to write. In any event, the students kept shoveling impersonal mail to us. Their way of proving they were delivering the mail. All mail, both incoming and outgoing, was opened and scrutinized.

Q: It gave you a sense though how the issue was preoccupying the country?

GRAVES: Gradually, near the end, they even gave us some scissored news magazines. So we learned a lot at the very end, but not earlier. There were always hostages that had news because they got a lot of mail. Their news got passed around surreptitiously even though we were not allowed to talk to each other. So we did have some news, but much of it was distorted or inaccurate.

Q: Before we leave this chapter, do you want to say anything about the reintegration and depressurization from this experience?

GRAVES: Yes. Insofar as I could observe, most of the so-called "professional help" was of little use to us. Some of the ex-hostages may have benefited from talking about themselves. Others seem to have gained peace of mind from religious activities. But a few never seemed to recover, never seemed able to accept that hostage glory dims and you become like everybody else. Some of the ex-hostages went through a lot of turmoil, but I doubt that the hostage experience scrambled them. However, the experience of being

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the center of attention after their release may have contributed to their undoing. Most of the people who survived well probably didn't have many serious personal problems to start with, and most of the ones that had great difficulty readjusting to wife, family, dog, shoes and sex probably had severe problems prior to being held hostage. I don't have the impression that the hostage experience in itself was the cause of all of the ensuing maladjustment. Vietnam was far more traumatic. Youngsters of 18 confronted with death and mayhem. Killing and seeing their buddies maimed and killed. Far more traumatic than anything that happened to the hostages.

Q: I have a sense over the last hour that you're at ease with the experience, without rancor vis # vis your captors, at least the students, that you've made your peace with it as a kind of a historical inevitability.

GRAVES: Inevitability? Be that as it may, I never had great rancor or ill feelings toward our captors. Many of the students were by nature gentle, but religion and revolution demanded that they impose on us. At best, they found it hard to understand some of our concerns. At times they were downright shocked by our ways. For example, when they discovered we urinated standing up and exposed rather than crouched down. I sometimes became exasperated by what seemed to me to be unnecessarily rigid restraints and stupid errors like dumping stale bread in the toilets or plugging American equipment into 220 volt outlets, thereby blocking the plumbing or destroying our electric heaters. Then I would ruefully remind myself that we would probably be faring worse if we were prisoners of American college kids who had to feed and care for us.

Sometimes they asked me to help them with their homework in English or invited me to play chess with them. The "Dwarf" often brought us extra clothing he had somehow got hold of. During Ramadan, when I was in solitary confinement in a dreary prison cell, I was always hungry by late afternoon. One of the students guards was a plump fellow who obviously liked to eat. I tempted him into sin with, "There must be some dates in the

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kitchen.” I could see his mind working. If he brought me dates, a few might fall into his mouth on the way to my cell.

But I had ill feelings about American policy in Iran, which I think, over the years, was not in the interest of the United States. I had more ill feeling concerning the bankers who probably set back our release by months with their demands for guarantees that their investments be protected. Iranian funds abroad were frozen. So there was a great deal of controversy about how all that money would get divvied up.

Q: The bankers or transition of administration from Carter to Reagan?

GRAVES: I think the Iranians' hatred of Carter, who talked agreement while organizing an armed rescue attempt, prolonged our captivity also. They didn't want to release us while Carter was still president. After our release I was sorry to see that the Congressional promises of investigations were shelved. It seemed to me that America should have had opportunity to air U.S. policy and interventions in Iran over the years. As a professional writer, I set to work to promote such an airing. I had a good contract with “Penthouse” magazine, but I was refused authorization to publish. I tried participating in American talk shows. Frustration. Only human interest stuff. No substance allowed. I didn't even manage to effectively make the point that our captors really were students. For America and Americans they just had to be dirty Communists working for the Russians.

Q: As an outsider, one has the impression that the hostage experience was a bonding one among hostages for some, that they have kept in touch closely over the years, and for others a divisive one among hostages. How do you view that?

GRAVES: It was said over and over again with reason that there were 52 people, very different people, and that generalizations would be misleading. I, for example, had little interest in joining the group Bruce Laingen organized in Washington. But I enjoyed seeing some of them and maintained close relations with one former hostage who came with his family to visit us in Rabat. The hostage experience was never my whole life. It isn't

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important in my life now. When I discovered I couldn't get a debate started regarding U.S. policy in Iran because I couldn't publish, I gradually stopped following closely events in Iran. I was never an Iranian specialist.

Q: A lot of hostages did publish. One thinks of Morehead Kennedy's book, "Ayatollah in the Cathedral" and there have been a number of others. Those were accounts when they retired. What do you think of those accounts such as you've read?

GRAVES: I read them all and found parts of them interesting but on balance disappointing because none took issue with American policy in Iran. The central business of career diplomats, American Foreign Service people, is American policy and actions abroad. The books focused on personal experiences. One book told of a hostage's friendship with a young Iranian. Others evoked the saving grace of religious faith. Happily, none dished out distilled hatred. You mentioned Morehead Kennedy who retired early from the Foreign Service and took a job with a religious organization, which turned out rather badly. He was confronted with dangerous intolerance and dogma.

Q: John, you're out of Iran. You're going through a transition. You're back in Washington. It is 1981. You went then from 1982-1986 as the public affairs officer in Montevideo, Uruguay. How did your transition from hostage lead into that assignment?

GRAVES: I had accrued a lot of home leave. For once, I was able to take it all, which is rare in the case of senior officers. I thoroughly enjoyed it and did a lot of writing and public speaking. I also served in BEX and learned about examinations and recruitment. But I'm a field hand. I wanted to go back overseas. As a former hostage I pretty well could have had any assignment I wanted. All those years in French-speaking countries, I kept thinking I would like to try something else, but my French always persuaded Personnel that I could best serve where my French would be useful. Besides, I have little language-learning ability. (My aptitude test scores showed that it would be foolish to assign me to FSI to learn a foreign language.) I knew the test was right. No ear and no memory. I

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had learned something of Uruguay from my experience in Santa Isabel where the UN people I got to know best were from Uruguay. It sounded like a fascinating country, an incredible social experiment. So I requested assignment to Uruguay. I spent something like nine months in Spanish-language training but never got to the required 3 level, even though proper students arrive there after four months of training. Nonetheless the folks at FSI were very kind to me. A big pow-wow in the director's office where I was frank to admit that my teachers were excellent and the fault was all mine. They kept asking me what they could do to help. In desperation, I finally suggested that part of what they were teaching didn't have much relevance to my case. For example, the course spent time trying to make English speakers understand the idea of grammatical gender, which I was born to. I finally suggested a transition course, similar to those which converted Spanish speakers to Portuguese or vice-versa. So I was given individual day-long lessons with teachers who knew some French. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience at FSI and my teachers, who came from various Latin American countries and Spain. But I made very slow progress and the powers that be finally gave me a waiver to go to Uruguay without adequate language skills.

Q: Do you think the mental strain of being 14 months a hostage and living with maybe not making it out and then you go cold turkey into nine months of intensive language training. That's pretty tough.

GRAVES: No, I don't think so. I just didn't have any aptitude for foreign-language learning, which is the case for most adults. All children have a marvelous, built in ability to learn natural languages, but they lose most of this program by puberty. According to recent research, childhood-acquired languages are lodged in a different sector of the brain than languages acquired as an adult. For an adult, there are languages that are closer or further removed from the so-called native language. Thus Chinese is a very hard language for English speakers whereas Spanish is relatively easy.

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Q: What I'm asking is whether having just been a hostage impeded in any way your ability to concentrate over long periods of time.

GRAVES: No doubt my ability to concentrate wasn't as good as when I was twenty, but I doubt that this had much to do with the hostage experience. Be that as it may, I found grappling with Spanish instructive. During my years in French-speaking countries, I observed that many of my colleagues had problems working in French and avoided it when possible. Some even went downhill, gradually losing what French they had learned in FSI. They had hang-ups I could observe but couldn't fully understand. When I arrived in Uruguay, I couldn't communicate. My first experience of being cut off. I labored in an embassy language class every morning. I listened and watched television every evening. At the end of two years, I was at the 3/3 level and could more or less carry on business in Spanish. At the end of my third year I was tested at the 4 level, fluent in Spanish and at ease with Uruguayans. But I have never forgotten what it was like to pick up a telephone knowing I was in for an ordeal. I finally came to understand my colleagues' problems in French-speaking countries. I remember a political officer in Rabat complaining that he had been doing fine talking with a Moroccan at a reception until I came along and joined in. My native fluency caused the Moroccan to switch to normal colloquial French, which was nearly incomprehensible to my colleague.

Q: What was Uruguay all about?

GRAVES: Uruguay is probably the only place in the world where 19th century Fabian socialist ideas were fully realized. And without bloodshed. By 1920 Uruguayans were perhaps the most happy people in the world. Not just because Uruguay was prosperous, not just because it had a temperate climate and beautiful beaches. It also had separation of church and state, a secularized calendar, free schooling through university, redistribution of wealth, easy naturalization, right of women to divorce and abortion and contraception, protection of prostitutes, right to strike, the eight-hour workday, early and generous retirement, free medical and dental care, and finally lots of paid holidays and

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a long paid summer vacation. Uruguayans became the most robust, the best educated and the most agnostic people on earth. Because the difference between the richest and the poorest was much reduced, most Uruguayans came to think of themselves as middle class. Decades of gentle, democratic socialism taught them how to enjoy life to the full: sun, beaches, sea, sex, sports, travel, family, conversation, friends, music, art, books. Caruso visited Montevideo more often than New York. Being soccer as well as cultural nuts, Uruguayans created the World Cup. They became great experts at enjoying life to the full.

Perhaps it wasn't just the socialist program which made Uruguay different from Argentina. Uruguay is Spanish-speaking but it was never a Crown Colony. The kind of people who settled there may have been different. There may have been a larger proportion of what the Spanish call "new Christians," Jews and Muslims who made a quick conversion to get to the New World because otherwise they wouldn't have been allowed to migrate. So maybe the population was a little different from the Spanish who peopled Argentina or Peru.

Later the Italians arrived. About half the population of present-day Uruguay is of Italian origin. A close friend who was Minister of Education and a neighbor took to dropping in on Saturday for lunch at our house. He always claimed it was because of my wife's excellent cooking rather than my conversation. He was a historian and full of amusing anecdotes. One day he claimed with a straight face that all the damned Italians who infested Uruguay were the fault of us North Americans. He was of Hispanic origins. He claimed the Italians had intended to settle in North America but our Civil War turned them toward Uruguay. In any case, the population is primarily Spanish and Italian, but there are a significant number of people of British and German origin as well as Jews who came out of Europe because of the Nazi persecutions.

Q: Nazi war criminals as well?

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GRAVES: First there was the famous Graf Spee which was scuttled off the coast of Uruguay. The German crew came ashore and settled in Uruguay. As for Nazi war criminals, I have the impression that far more ended up in neighboring Argentina or Brazil. Some even hid out under the auspices of the Jews whom they paid for protection. Ironic, hardly politically correct to dwell on it, but some Nazi war criminals could not hide anywhere else than among the Jews. Some even became sincere practicing Jews. One famous Nazi officer even migrated to Israel to help defend the Jewish state.

Q: Thinking about it, you were previously the public affairs officer in Tehran, one of the major embassies at that time in the world. Uruguay must have seemed to you and to the Department a kind of continuing decompression from Iran.

GRAVES: A vacation.

Q: How did it become the most important post?

GRAVES: In talking with Uruguayans in Santa Isabel 10 years earlier, I became intrigued by their socialism. I was convinced that socialist and especially Marxist regimes would never work because of human nature. But what happens when, instead of installing the socialist or Communist agenda by force and maybe displacing millions and killing a lot of people, as was the case with Stalin, socialism is adopted without bloodshed. In Uruguay nobody got killed. Eventually, I think nearly all Uruguayans thoroughly enjoyed their socialist program. It worked for a while because the country was so rich. They were in the business of exporting meat. The grass was lush and the market was great because of the disruptions of two world wars and the Korean War. Uruguay could sell all its beef at a good price even though Uruguayans were not big on competition and hard work. So what happens to people living in prosperous socialism?

Ordinary Uruguayans became incredibly educated, incredibly knowledgeable and interested in the arts and books. And they had the advantage of Spanish, which, unlike

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English, reforms its spelling regularly. Therefore, there is no gap between pronunciation and spelling. Spanish speakers can read anything they can understand orally. When we say someone can't read English, we may be talking about someone who just doesn't have the intelligence or knowledge to understand a given text. But many people who can't read a given text with understanding can understand the text when it is read out loud to them. Their problem is reading. The problem hardly exists in Spanish. We had, for example, a gardener who was literally simple-minded, but I could leave him notes and he could read them. He could read anything he could understand orally.

Q: So, the fascination for you was linguistic and because, with such an educated population, they were very receptive to your professional programming as PAO.

GRAVES: Eager but critical. Programs had to be first-rate for audiences in Montevideo. But we didn't turn down lesser shows if they could travel in the provinces. In terms of our goals, the best was Rostropovich, conductor of the Washington Metropolitan orchestra. He had been in Montevideo years earlier as a cellist under the auspices of the Soviets. I thought to myself, "Nobody, not even Goebbels at his best (worst?), ever produced a propaganda coup to equal Rostropovich in Montevideo under American auspices". After the excellent concert, he talked in broken English about his experiences, tears in his eyes, before switching to Russian and his interpreter. He expressed his gratitude for the welcome he had received in the United States when the apparatchiks forced him to defect and how much he admired what he had found in America. Still, he added, tears running down his cheeks, his heart was in Russia. But what fascinated me most was observing people who for several generations had lived under benign socialism. No oppression. For example, the traditional Christian calendar of holidays and names was modified, but people were not constrained. Those who wished continued to attend church services even though many Uruguayans were agnostic. So what happens to people who have a humanist creed but don't feel a compelling need for absolutes? This was very different from dogmatic Communism. What I discovered is that benign socialism produces kind, gentle, unhurried people, but they aren't hardworking or competitive except when it comes

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to soccer. If you ask people for directions on the street, as we did when we first arrived, they will stop everything and take you to where you want to go.

Q: Do we really have here something unique to Uruguay or is it the case that you had previously served in almost entirely Third World countries (Congo, Madagascar, Vietnam, Togo, Cameroon, and Iran) and that you were struck by the appreciation of Western culture and higher education? Would you not have had that same impression in Luxembourg?

GRAVES: Probably not. I know the U.S., Canada, and France well and to a lesser extent Germany and Finland, which I inspected. I have even visited in Luxembourg several times. When I think about those developed countries in comparison with Uruguay, what strikes me is the ability of Uruguayans to enjoy life, their easygoing way. I should perhaps emphasize at this point that Uruguay is not a Third World country. The population is almost entirely of European extraction and the climate is like the south of France. In 1920 their standard of living, by most measures, was certainly higher than the level in the U.S.

But now I want to get to the real point. Uruguay came unstuck. After World War II, once the Korean War was over, countries that had been partly destroyed or much distracted by war rebuilt and modernized their means of production. Uruguay was no longer competitive. Not only price and quality, but the idea of selling, of packaging, Uruguayans just weren't good at it. Uruguay's living standard fell. Its social services declined. Worse, it had lots of highly educated people and a system that kept cranking out still more highly educated people who had few job prospects. Instead of beef, Uruguay exported doctors, architects, and engineers. An economic disaster. Worse yet the escape valve wasn't sufficient. Unemployment and high education produce an explosive mixture. Enter the Tupamaros. It started with the medical students, Robin Hood pranksters who took from the rich and gave to the poor. But the movement soon degenerated into hostage taking and murder, including the killing of an American working in our embassy.

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Q: Was that in your time?

GRAVES: No, it was before I arrived. In any case, the terrorist tactics of the Tupamaros became such a problem that the Uruguayan government unraveled. (It was certainly one of the most democratic and also one of the least effective governments imaginable, where the need to create consensus made decision-making a circus). Eventually, the President of Uruguay called in the military to deal with the urban guerrillas. The military successfully repressed the Tupamaros along with a great many others. The repression was not as severe as the terrorism employed by the military in Argentina or Chile. Nonetheless, several hundred people disappeared and many more were imprisoned and tortured.

Q: This was under, by then, the military regime.

GRAVES: Right. Uruguay had a long democratic tradition. Unlike its neighbors, it had never experienced a military take-over. In 1933, the President, outraged because Parliament wasn't doing what he wanted, decided to disband Parliament. He called in not the army, but the firemen to chase out the parliamentarians. The coup only lasted a day. When the military took over in the 1970s, they did it gradually. No doubt they were influenced by what was happening in Argentina and elsewhere. Uruguay ended up with a military dictatorship which lasted 10 years.

Q: The dictator was who?

GRAVES: Nominally, Alvarez. But there was no central person, no personality cult. Alvarez did not wield power. It was the military as a group who devised and implemented the program. They had heated discussions and disagreed among themselves before taking a decision. In sum, the military were Uruguayans. But they never figured out how to improve the economy. On the contrary, it got worse under the military. They didn't know what to do. They had run out of steam and answers. Their chief concern when I arrived was to tippy toe out and go back to their barracks, but they feared retribution. They even

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held a referendum to change the constitution, which they lost because they organized it like Uruguayans—honest and fair. By this time, I had become good friends with the man who was most likely to be elected President of Uruguay if ever an election were allowed. We often talked about the process which, with luck, would lead to an elected civilian government. We even talked about the problem of retribution and the compromises that would have to be made to avoid civil war. Justice versus order.

The military were desperate to hand over their economic disaster to the politicians. They convoked a long series of meetings with them and for want of better, finally agreed to more or less abide by the constitution and let the political parties elect a parliament. But several parties such as the Communists were not authorized to participate. One of the Blanco leaders who was especially charismatic was confined to jail when he returned from exile. He wasn't allowed to run, but he was nonetheless in the running because Uruguay has a system where, in effect, it has primary elections within the general election. Each party presents several lists of candidates. The candidates are inscribed in each list in the order they will be selected for parliament after the vote is counted and the number of seats has been allotted to each list. The Blanco lists that favored the jailed leader did better than the other lists. So from the Blanco standpoint, he came out ahead and would in effect be the head of the opposition. The Colorado lists got more votes than the Blanco lists so they would form the government. Finally the Colorado lists which favored Sanganetti did better than the other Colorado lists so Sanganetti became President. Complicated but no more so than our Electoral College.

Q: Sanganetti was your close contact?

GRAVES: Right.

Q: And he came into the presidency roughly midway into your tour?

GRAVES: Toward the end.

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Q: 1985/1986?

GRAVES: 1986.

Q: *So, you were quite involved then in the restructuring.*

GRAVES: We were very much involved. But our chief concern was to avoid doing anything that would upset the process of the return of the civilians. We couldn't be identified with any candidate or any party. That would be the kiss of death. Fortunately, we had a DCM who was one of the best officers I've ever worked with, Rick Melton, who went on to be ambassador to Brazil. His mission in Uruguay was to get the military out, the civilians in, and nobody killed.

We had a political ambassador because Uruguay is a very pleasant place. Aranda was a Chicano lawyer and a former American military pilot. Our problem with him was that he didn't know much about foreign affairs. Being a military man and a Latino, he wanted to be a hands-on boss. My first year with him was difficult. I tried to explain to him, "Look, you were a military pilot. You know about airplanes but not much about how embassies work. Just tell us what you want to get done and let us do it. When you put your hands on the levers you get into a big mess." He had already gone through one DCM, a complete shoot-out with him. He couldn't have had worse relations with the press. And he didn't understand, because he was a military man, that it wasn't a good idea to have lunch in a restaurant with the military who were in power. Worst of all, neither Rick nor I could reduce the damage caused when he talked in public because he spoke Spanish as a native language at a speed that was incredible. No way to intervene the way I sometimes did in French. For example, in Yaounde we had to cope with the visit of a VIP. He was slightly to the right of Genghis Khan and he insisted on having a press conference so he would have press clippings to take home. He was sure to say things contrary to our policy which would upset the Africans. The Ambassador took me aside and said, "John, you're the interpreter. You go out there and interpret him right back to Main Street." But we couldn't do that with

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Aranda. He spoke Spanish much better than the rest of us. And some of the things he said to the press would make your hair stand on end.

Q: That is, his ties were to the military.

GRAVES: At least he didn't know how to deal with the politicians who were out of power. But he gradually learned and became, at the end, a good friend and confidant after he decided to let me write his speeches, which were translated into good Uruguayan Spanish. He could memorize anything. I also gave him a bunch of statements for all sorts of occasions. He learned to place them well. He got to the point where he was good with the press. They came to love him because he was witty and comfortable with them.

Q: So, you were able to take this political ambassador and gain his confidence and play to his skills as a Spanish-speaker and that was a great professional experience.

GRAVES: A great satisfaction for me. But I had a lot of help. Excellent officers who knew Spanish and the Latinos. Still I was frustrated at the outset by my lack of comprehension in Spanish. I couldn't circulate freely and build up a collection of excellent contacts. I couldn't become the best informed officer in the embassy as I had usually been in French-speaking countries. But I hit it off well with the DCM. We became good friends. Even though I didn't have much to report, he liked to bounce ideas off me and suggested I drop in to his office before going home each evening. This led me to an idea which might make me a better interlocutor. I asked the chief FSN in the press section to come to my office at the end of his day to report on all the rumors he had heard. He had worked for years as a journalist so I suggested he visit his old haunts during the day. At first he was reluctant, but he gradually came to enjoy regaling me with his stories. I would bring up what he told me with my chauffeur who would often add tidbits or even entirely different versions. When I was satisfied that I had a viable working source, I casually suggested to the DCM that we might profit from knowing what ordinary folks were talking about. "There's a guy at my tennis club who has a newsstand downtown and plays cards at the club most nights. He

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knows everybody and hears everything.” I then proceeded to unload my bag of rumors. As luck would have it, much of what I told the DCM that first evening turned out to be both accurate and useful. From then on he always greeted me with “What’s the latest from your kiosk man?” It worked out beautifully. We often knew in advance of things that were important to our operations. Of course many of the rumors were nonsense, but even they gave us clues as to what was worrying the Uruguayans.

Uruguay was a great experience for me. For once in my life, I was completely in accord with American policy and what the DCM was trying to do. We still had the problem of obsessive anti-Communism. Washington and the hard-liners who were more comfortable with military dictatorships than with democracies and mouthy Swedes. They could scuttle the process of return to democracy. But in the embassy we agreed with our publicly-stated policy and what we were trying to accomplish in Uruguay. Even the CIA station chief was not opposed. As he said, “My assets are all trained on the Soviet Union. You guys can do whatever you like. I’m not going to get involved. I don’t work much at collecting Uruguayan stuff. That’s not where my assets are.” I felt that our embassy operations were in the interests of America, Uruguay and the human race. An exhilarating experience after Vietnam and Iran.

Q: One thinks of the Uruguayan tariff reduction round in connection with Uruguay, but that was not on your watch?

GRAVES: No, it was afterwards. They met in Punta del Este, which is a beautiful resort, one of the richest in the world. You can see more sumptuous yachts there than on the Cote d’Azur.

Q: John, all good things come to an end. You left Montevideo in 1986. You said earlier, despite your bilingualism, that you are a poor language learner and struggled with Spanish, but they put you into Arabic training in Tunis, is that so?

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GRAVES: Right. A case of blindly going by book and rule. Even if I had been a great language learner, I couldn't possibly have learned enough Arabic in a year for it to be of much use to me in carrying on embassy business in Rabat. The Department argues that you do a year of Arabic, then a tour in an Arabic-speaking country, and then come back to FSI and take another year of Arabic and thus become an Arabist. Occasionally, this works. But I was close to mandatory retirement, so it was ridiculous to assign me to FSI Tunis. A waste of the taxpayers' money and my poor teachers' time. I would be a thorn in their side because I wouldn't be able to keep up with my classmates. Happily, the Director of FSI Tunis was a realist. We became good friends. He justified organizing a class just for me because of my grade. He also noticed that I could communicate in plain French with the Tunisian bureaucracy better than he could in Arabic and often asked me to help resolve a sticky problem. He also noted that I got on with ordinary Tunisians much better than his non-Tunisian teachers who had trouble with colloquial Tunisian Arabic. The notion that Arabs speak classical Arabic is like maintaining that Italians speak Latin when in fact Spaniards, Frenchmen, Portuguese, and Italians can't easily talk to each other. I like Tunisians. They are charming. So I had a very good year. Our house was right on the Mediterranean and the sea food was exquisite.

Q: You went to school in Sidi Bou Saïd.

GRAVES: Right.

Q: But you were with a group of quite motivated middle grade officers ambitious to learn Arabic. There were frictions that you weren't going at their pace in the class, were there not?

GRAVES: No problem. I was in a class by myself. Besides, the military were greatly impressed by my rank, the equivalent of a two-star general. One of my Tunisian teachers was a former diplomat. He always addressed me as Monsieur le Ministre.

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It was a pleasant experience. I certainly had a good time with my teachers, the Tunisians especially. We became friends. I was invited to their homes and got to know their families. We used to joke that I was the only student who observed the rule that no one was allowed to speak English at FSI.

Q: You knew when you were there that you were headed as PAO to Rabat, Morocco. You were there from 1987-1990. That would have been working with Ambassador Tom Nassif. I know I was then in Casablanca and we worked together.

GRAVES: Right. Nassif was a political appointee.

Q: You had been in Rabat years ago, from 1959-1961, teaching at thuniversity. What did you find when you got there?

GRAVES: The first thing that struck me was that it was much less French than it had been. Certainly the population had changed. Especially in Tangier, which had been a prosperous cosmopolitan city, but predominately Spanish. I was surprised to find that all the Moroccans I needed to deal with in Tangier now spoke French, so even there I had no need to use the very little Arabic that I had learned. I found the experience of working with a political ambassador who was essentially a political animal and a good businessman, enlightening. He was of Lebanese extraction but didn't speak fluent Arabic or French. I watched him operate and found that in certain cases he did very well, which impressed me. I was always amazed how he got on with the Minister of Interior, for example. He only took me along to see the Minister when he had something specific to confirm and wanted to be sure he understood. I had the big advantage of being on the inside and knowing what was going on. I was present at high-level talks even when I wasn't interpreting. Present to listen and afterwards to clarify and confirm what had been said.

Q: Are we talking here about King Hassan II?

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GRAVES: Yes. I had known him earlier.

Q: You interpreted at some of the meetings with him?

GRAVES: Yes. He knew me well. Even called me by my first name. He was always glad to see me, glad I was there. For example, I was the interpreter when Senator Dole and his wife visited the palace. It was an interesting experience because Malcolm Forbes, along with Elizabeth Taylor, was there for a birthday party. So I was interpreter for them as well when they talked with the King. Forbes had a sumptuous house in Tangier and a famous collection of toy soldiers, which I never saw. I was never invited to his extravagant parties, which brought celebrities from around the world to Tangier.

At the time of Senator Dole and his cabinet-rank wife's visit, we had a new political ambassador. His wife, an able young woman, had never been allowed to go to the palace, which annoyed her. I suggested to the Ambassador that, since Mrs. Dole would be participating because of her cabinet rank, we could probably get away with including the Ambassador's wife in our party. She thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

Q: I am getting the picture from both Uruguay and now Morocco with the three successive political ambassadors that perhaps you found as a professional that you had more influence and more fulfillment working with political ambassadors who brought other skills and contacts.

GRAVES: I also had the good luck to work with some really first-rate career ambassadors. I learned a lot from them. Michael Ussery was the first political ambassador with whom I got on immediately. He had good contacts at the White House and knew Washington, but didn't have an agenda which put me off. Nassif, on the other hand, was involved in promoting personal business deals which disturbed me. A lot of diverse experiences, but none of them was more exhilarating than working in Uruguay with Rick Melton, a fellow career officer.

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Q: You had career DCMs in Rabat, probably for most of that time Harman Kirby or John Hawes?

GRAVES: I didn't get on with Hawes. I found him rigid, in one case so rigid that I finally brought the problem up with the Ambassador. Our chief consular officer was young and inexperienced. He adamantly refused to issue a student visa to a young woman because she had lied to him. She was more capricious and flighty than dissembling and the daughter of a very influential Moroccan. Her father called me and laid out the case, admitting that his daughter was wrong, but was nonetheless a legitimate student who fully met all our criteria for a student visa, even though she hadn't gotten around to applying properly. She had already spent several years as a student in the U.S. I argued that her lies were silly fabrications, an attempt to cover up the fact that she had been too lazy to fill out the renewal forms correctly and before the deadline. But the important thing is that we're trying to promote American interests in Morocco and it's not in our interests to refuse entry to this young woman, thereby incurring the wrath of her father. Hawes and the consular officer would have none of it. She was in direct violation of one of the principal rules of our consular service. I finally laid the case out to the ambassador and he got the visa issued. The father was grateful to the Ambassador and became a useful contact. But to get back to Nassif, there were moments when I was not comfortable with his business dealing. You must have seen more of that than I did.

Q: I was in Casablanca.

GRAVES: And he was often in Casa wheeling and dealing.

Q: I wasn't aware...

GRAVES: And he came back after he was no longer Ambassador to do business in Casablanca.

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Q: His business.

But, John, you mentioned that Uruguay was the only post where you felt in accord with U.S. policy. What were the points of difference in Morocco?

GRAVES: We had considerable leverage, what with our aid programs, but we didn't use it to encourage the king to build lasting institutions as Juan Carlos was doing in Spain. Hassan II ran Morocco like a feudal kingdom, playing one power group off against another. He improvised to keep everyone except the palace weak. He had brains, education, experience, and baraka. I think he could have been more of a Juan Carlos than he was. I could be very wrong because Moroccans aren't Spaniards and the two cultures are not all that similar. Sometimes he seemed needlessly arbitrary and mean-spirited. There were a lot of political prisoners. Of course, there were several terrible shoot-outs. The king's miraculous escapes from assassination attempts. Skhirat and the airplane attack.

Q: The attempts of 1971 and 1972.

GRAVES: Oufkir, the very close collaborator that he apparently personally shot. In any case, I didn't feel I was doing anything terribly useful in Morocco. Whereas in Uruguay, I had the feeling that what the embassy was doing was worthwhile. In Morocco, I guess my chief satisfaction came from teaching my young officers our business.

Q: You were in Morocco at a very interesting period. The world was changing. The Soviet Union was collapsing. North Africa and Morocco were no longer the strategic points in the Cold War that they had been, with the Straits of Gibraltar. Aid levels were beginning to fall. The Moroccans were becoming concerned about where they fitted into this threadbare bicentennial relationship. There was a bit of smoke and mirrors to convince them that they were important to us. You must have played a big role in that.

GRAVES: Right, but I didn't feel terribly comfortable with the show. I was well aware that it wasn't in the cards. American support for Morocco was going to gradually diminish. But I

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thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to really get to know the Russians in Rabat, have frank talks with them. They were Gorbachev fans and welcomed the exhilarating changes in the Soviet Union. They invited us and we invited them. (I had a much tougher time trying to get to know the Chinese, even though the Chinese ambassador's wife spoke French and invited us to their residence.) The Russians were eager to talk about anything and everything. But it was time for me to do something else. I was no longer fascinated by the job.

Q: You were looking towards retirement. There wasn't fire in your belly. Still, that was a big operation you were in charge of there. It was one, if I remember, that had been moved away from a prime location in the center of the town out to the suburbs, which you were opposed to, as part of a worldwide movement. You were trying to keep up interest in the library and in the center.

GRAVES: I was trying to open a store-front operation in downtown Rabat similar to what the Russians had, but our security people quashed my plans. They knew nothing about our priorities and goals. Also, I had horrendous personnel problems. All those folks in the VOA operations.

Q: *Were you not constructing the largest radio transmitter in the free world?*

GRAVES: We were building an antenna farm near Tangier. But by this time, I was convinced that short-wave radio was dead. A waste of money. I had been involved, when I was an inspector, with the VOA antenna farm in the Philippines. All the security and logistic problems. In Tangier it was the personnel problems that worried me. All those Americans who probably shouldn't have been sent abroad, couldn't get on with foreigners, couldn't even get on with each other. So I often had to go to Tangier to get someone out of jail or go to the antenna farm to attend gripe sessions.

Q: *These were basically technicians building a half a billion dollar project.*

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GRAVES: And I was responsible for our negotiations with the Moroccans. There were some 180 employees. Any group of that size is bound to produce personnel problems, but this bunch were problem-prone.

Q: And there were difficult the negotiations of turning over the prior station to the Moroccans along with some of the equipment.

GRAVES: Right. But we were giving them training and equipment that wasn't worth much. Too hard to operate and maintain, too hard to get replacement parts. And even more important, by this time short-wave was no longer attracting listeners. In years past, short-wave had been a prime source of information, especially in countries where information was reduced, distorted, or just plain fabricated by the government. But by this time, people were listening to medium wave or watching television rather than twiddling short-wave knobs to tune in the latest static. In Latin America we had long since gone to placing post-recorded VOA programs with small, local medium-wave radio stations. It's easy to get such stations to use VOA material because they are always short on stuff to fill broadcast time.

Q: You also were involved in perhaps starting, or at least maintaining a branch post in Marrakesh. There was Jim Mandros. Or had that been closed by the time you...

GRAVES: It was closed later when Jim Mandros' replacement decided he didn't like living in Marrakesh. Mandros was a fellow who liked to make his opinions known. Sometimes his opinions were a little kooky, but he was a great field hand and was doing a superb job in Marrakesh. The operation under Mandros was well worth maintaining.

Q: I felt that, as a one-man band at that branch post in Marrakesh, he was giving the French Cultural Center, the largest that they had in Africa, a fair run for the money.

GRAVES: Mandros loved Marrakesh and ran a really effective USIS program. It was a much better operation than the one that you knew in Casablanca, which was better

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located to promote our goals. Still, our International Visitor program in Casa was especially effective. Do you remember the journalist sons of the entrenched Communist leader? We sent them on a visit to the U.S. and they came back to write reams of intelligent commentary on the virtues of America.

Q: Those were the twin sons of the Communist leader, Ali Yata?

GRAVES: Exactly. They became great fans of America.

Q: A propos of the mention of the French Center in Marrakesh, the French presence was less than when you were there before, but still, there were a lot of Frenchmen. It was regarded by some still as a French chasse gardée. What was your perception of U.S.-French cooperation or noncooperation in Morocco?

GRAVES: I didn't find any animosity. On the contrary, the French cultural center in Rabat was cooperative, inviting us to participate in their shows and contributing acts to our programs. They had more assets than we did so it was a good deal for us. They had a tougher time in Tangier so we helped them there. We didn't have a cultural center, but we had the old consulate, the legation which had been turned into a museum with good space for exhibits, shows and receptions. The director was good at public relations. So we were helpful to the French in Tangier and they were helpful to us in Rabat.

Q: You were involved in some of the planning for a so-called American university at Ifrane and the back and forth with the Consortium of the University of Texas in setting that up. Eventually, the Saudis put in \$50 million and it became El Aqawain University. What are your thoughts on that?

GRAVES: It was only the outset and I was very skeptical that it would get off the ground. I knew the University of Beirut, the only thing I could connect it with. Beirut had been very effective because of the missionaries, but I couldn't see at that point that American support would remain steadfast. You need people. Money is important, but people who are really

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committed, who are really convinced that what they are doing is important, that I couldn't see. I couldn't see how it would work. I wasn't against it. When I left, it was just at the beginning.

Q: John Waterbury wrote in his book in the late 1950s that Morocco was a country waiting for an explosion that never comes. With your own 30 year perspective on it, what are your thoughts on its stability, future, succession?

GRAVES: I didn't know Sidi Mohammed, the Crown Prince, well. The few times I saw him, he was unimpressive. All I heard about him was unfavorable. I knew his cousin, who was educated in the United States, much better and was impressed with him. But I didn't see how the succession could be changed. However, I recall that the same things were said about young Moulay Hassan when Mohammed V died. Forty years later, Hassan is still very much in charge. The country, relative to other Arab countries, is stable. I think the Moroccans have done a great deal better than most other Arabs. Take Algeria, for example, which is a disaster. The Moroccans may well be the happiest of Arabs, even though there is a great deal of misery. I would have liked to see viable institutions installed while there was power to install them. Still, having been dead wrong about Moulay Hassan's staying power gives me pause. Maybe Mohammed, a young man I don't really know, will prove to be a capable leader.

Q: With the experience you had had before, particularly in Iran with students close up, what did you think about the Moroccan students? There is periodic student unrest, frustration among them, but perhaps not the same political temper that you saw elsewhere.

GRAVES: Moroccans don't have the same religious fervor that I have observed elsewhere. The fundamentalists are a small group in Morocco. The main thing that concerns me always with Arab students is that they tend to want to study the wrong things. They are interested in law but not in technical studies such as engineering. They just don't seem to

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be oriented, which is strange when you think of Arab history, toward science, technology or management. They all want to be in law school.

Q: As we wind down this Morocco segment, I was struck that, as you talked about it, clearly Montevideo was much more of a high point. This last post, the golden post before retirement, somehow didn't match it. Was that just simply that you were ready to go or do you have some regrets about Morocco, things you never got to there?

GRAVES: I think it was a combination of things. It was the end of my career. At that point, it was a great luxury to be able to choose my next assignment. I asked for either Rabat or Ottawa as my last post. It turned out to be Rabat. (I had not anticipated the year in Tunis, but I enjoyed it.) As for Morocco, I probably arrived there with nostalgic expectations based on my experience as a very young man.

Q: This has been a very interesting oral history. As we wind down, you have had some extraordinary career highlights. Is this something you would do again?

GRAVES: As Edith Piaf sang, *je ne regrette rien, non rien de rien* [French: I do not regret a thing, nothing at all]. I had a marvelous career, certainly not planned, not of my own doing, just felicitous bad luck. I never requested assignment to any of those hot spots. Remembering the security officer's comment when first I arrived in Iran, I stood up on the plane coming out of Iran and called to him, "Al, would you serve with me at another post?" He shouted back, "Hell, no!" And a whole chorus of joyous ex-hostages echoed him with, "Hell, no, never!" A fitting comment on my career. Al, knew something of my experiences in the Congo, Vietnam and Equatorial Guinea and had greeted me on my arrival in Tehran with, "Well, I knew things were bad here, but I didn't know they were that bad."

Q: You have reflected throughout this interview a skepticism about U.S. policy and the U.S. being able to get it right wherever it may be abroad, through the bureaucracy and

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blindness we have. Your career has also coincided with, the polls show, a tremendous loss of confidence in U.S. government.

GRAVES: Sad but true.

Q: The public, in a sense, shares this skepticism that you voiced. How did that change in public perception affect you or your own perception of a Foreign Service career?

GRAVES: Increasing public skepticism may, without my having been conscious of it, contributed to my own skepticism, but more important was my hands-on participation in dubious operations, especially Vietnam. But I should redress the balance. In my view, U.S. policy and interventions abroad were often ill-informed, even nefarious, but I doubt that any other country in the same circumstances with the same power would have done as well. I think we made a lot of grievous mistakes, but relatively speaking, I can't see where anybody else would have done better. The reason we did so badly is also the reason that I admire America and Americans. We are pluralistic and all the disparate interests get heard and exert pressure. What is in the interest of the general public, in the country, in humanity is not at all what is in the interest of the people exporting factory chickens or arms.

Q: *That was very much George Kennan's bottom line conclusion in his recent "Foreign Affairs" article.*

You were in USIA. That was your career focus. What do you think about it in the modern world and how do you feel about its merger completely into the State Department now?

GRAVES: I remember when cultural affairs and information were lodged in the Department. Like commerce they got short shrift. What with the advent of the Cold War it became clear that cultural affairs and information were potential arms in the battle against Communism. USIA was born. But once the Cold War ended, I think it was inevitable that USIA would decline and disappear into the Department. Unfortunately, the Department's traditional preoccupation with political reporting and government to government relations

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makes it difficult to take into account changing circumstances and priorities. I think we should be putting our marbles into consular services, especially American services, and into commercial services. Consular services and the image of America are important for American business abroad. USIS was in the image making business. I think it is a big mistake to do away with an entity which has experience in creating image. American embassies and consulates should be restructured to better serve American travelers and American business, which includes creating a good image of America in the minds of foreign people. Finally, the priorities involved in having effective representation abroad need to be emphasized in the battle against the security nuts and the support syndrome. Ambassador Briggs was absolutely right when he warned against our sending people abroad who couldn't survive abroad. Such people require support services so we now have people in our embassies and consulates supporting the support people who are supporting the support people. Most of the people in an American embassy or consulate are not involved with the priority business of the post. They are involved with serving the other Americans in the mission.

The security syndrome is as detrimental to good American representation abroad as the support syndrome. I got myself into difficulty in the Department when I was invited by Lew Hoffacker, who was then head of the anti-terrorism office, to talk to a group of JOTs about security. I told them that there isn't any way to avoid risk. Much of what we spend on security benefits the beltway bandits but it doesn't do much by way of making life abroad less risky. The most secure embassy configuration involves renting several stories in a very important hotel occupied by lots of people who aren't Americans. We rent the middle floors and severely control access to those floors. To get the Americans, terrorists have to risk harming a lot of non-Americans. Hardly a prestigious representation, but more secure than our sumptuous buildings turned into bunker operations. But the beltway bandits who have a lucrative monopoly on providing concrete and gadgets (no foreigners can bid) shame Congress and the American public into spending billions to protect their representatives abroad. The support people supporting support people supporting support

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people know little about the primary business and priorities of the embassy. They demand that the U.S. government assure their safety and take comfort in all the junk the beltway bandits load on the embassy. They are not willing to accept what I told the JOTs. If you go abroad, you are going to take risks. The Department was unhappy with what I told the JOTs, claiming I scared hell out of them and upset the assignment process.

Q: Still, that is a tough message now after Nairobi and Dar ESalaam.

GRAVES: True, but what could we have done to prevent those attacks, short of giving up the sumptuous digs which add to the prestige and effectiveness of our representation? The truth is, nothing. But we can't say that because many people would be frightened off and refuse to go abroad. So we can't tell them the truth, namely that there isn't any really effective security. All the window dressing doesn't really protect us. As I knew always in Vietnam, if the Viet Cong want to pay the price to get me tonight, there will be no morning.

Q: On that cheery note, this has been a very interesting oral history with John Graves conducted in Paris on January 11, 12, and 13, 1999 by Richard Jackson.

End of interview